

# DAMAGE BOOK





## *Candle-Indoors.*



BY THE  
SAME AUTHOR

\*

*ISLANDERS*  
*THE ASKING PRICE*  
*QUEST*  
*LABYRINTH*  
*THE SURREY FAMILY*  
*HEAT LIGHTNING*  
*HARDY PERENNIAL*  
*MORNING SHOWS THE DAY*  
*UNCOMMON PEOPLE*

CANDLE  
INDOORS

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*Helen Hull*

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## CANDLE INDOORS

*Come you indoors, come home; your fading fire  
Mend first and vital candle in close heart's vault:  
You there are master, do your own desire;  
What hinders? Are you beam-blind, yet to a fault  
In a neighbor deft-handed? Are you that liar  
And cast by conscience out, spendsavour salt?*

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS.



## *Book I*







## Book I

### I.

THE thing Arnold Carlton wanted to do was, first, to stop at the club for a few drinks, enough to float him out of the appalling black tension which had, after three days, grown unendurable; and, second, to call up someone, say Isabelle, and say he was dropping in. And he couldn't do either of these things, although he needed so terrifically to escape, and he knew no other formula. It was a curious experience, not to be able to do what he wished. He examined it cautiously, as one fingers a bruise, exploring the extent of injury. He had to go back to the house, no matter what he wished. The children would be there, waiting, and relatives. Lena, his sister, had given him a shrewd, impatient look when he said he had to stop at the factory on the way home from the cemetery.

"I thought the factory was closed."

"It is. But I haven't seen any mail since—"

"Don't be long, Arnold. I've got to get home myself, and we must make some arrangements about the children. It's a good time to decide, while we're all here."

They were all there, all right. The house was full of them, tip-toeing about, talking in undertones. He had escaped them for a few minutes, at least, but he couldn't relax, he couldn't think, his eyelids burned, his muscles twitched. Queer that death, in itself so quiet, so white-still, should produce such tension, this revolving pressure of things to be done, to be arranged, to be endured. He might as well start for the house. The factory, empty, silent, closed on account of death, had no

comfort in it; there was a kind of death in the absence of its sounds, the precise animation of machinery, the clink of metal, the vibration of voices. The letters on his desk had no meaning. Leave them until tomorrow. He jerked his long body up from the chair, stared a moment at letter files, at his stenographer's desk, at nothing, his blue eyes deep-set under dark lashes, heavy eyebrows, full of bewilderment. Of course Candace had been not very well for a long time, most of the time since the birth of little Candace. That was—how old was the child anyway—seven? But Arnold had never taken her ailments seriously. Had he half suspected that she preferred a gentle invalidism, using it for retaliation upon him? A way to leave him and yet stay. He tried the door to make sure the lock had caught, and crossed the small patch of grass to his car. She had died so suddenly that there was no time to understand what was happening. Arnold, unfortunately, had been showing the town to a customer from the middle-west, and couldn't be reached. When, in the early morning, he drove up the hill to his house, the brilliance of lights at many windows shouted disaster before he entered. Candace spoke just once, looking at him with strange eyes that did not know him. "Must I die?" she whispered. "Must I die?" It was the children for whom she looked, not him.

Arnold drove expertly through the slow traffic of the small town, settling more comfortably under the wheel as he reached the clearer stretch of the Post Road. He had supposed that things would go on as they were indefinitely. If he had supposed anything. And why should Candace, dead, be not the woman of last week, but the Candace he had married? Because if she had died years ago, he would have lost more? Because he had already lost—Motherless children. Poor kids. Even the minister spoke of them. They hadn't gone to the funeral. Arnold thought they should go, respect and all that, proper thing to do. But Doris, Candace's sister, insisted that

Candace didn't want them there. "She asked me to keep them away. She said 'Don't let them see me dead, don't let them go to the funeral.' "

"When did she say that? You weren't here—"

"Some time ago."

"She never said anything to me about death. Did she know?"

"There are more things than death that Candace didn't say to you."

Arnold had shrugged. Doris and he didn't hit it off well. She was too smart, one of these modern females. Apartment of her own in New York, office, Dr. Doris Langley, gynecologist, messing about with women's insides instead of having a husband and children of her own. Needn't tell him she didn't take her fun where she found it, for all she was so circumspect, pretending to be indignant when he'd tried her out a little. That was years ago, when she was a pretty girl still in college, spending a few summer weeks with Candace. Funny he should think of that today. She had gone on thinking of it for a while: he had seen her thinking of it when she looked at him with hard, affronted eyes. What a fuss about nothing! Fortunately she'd got wrapped up in what she called her career, so that she came to the country seldom, and not when he was home. He didn't like her influence on Candace; she was too hard, she knew too much. He'd see to it she kept her hands off his daughters. Not that they were much like her. He couldn't prevent her coming to the funeral, but she would return to the city, to whatever her life there was, and the children—

He lifted his foot from the accelerator so quickly that the car almost stopped. What about the children? Boarding schools. He'd suggested that a good boys' school was the place for Bill this year, and Candace wouldn't listen. "Not yet. I'd rather keep them home this year. It won't be long—" Till they grow up, he thought she meant. It hadn't been long.

Just until November. Now he'd have to find out about good schools. Even little Candace was old enough. Have to ask somebody about schools. Lena might have ideas. He drove on more rapidly. Hurry up and get the pow-wow over. He'd close the house, get an apartment for himself, New York perhaps, couldn't stay alone in that great place. Wouldn't sell it, the children might want it later, after they finished school. Extraordinary, the way with Candace's death the feeling of permanence had vanished from the place. A week ago it had been fixed, stable, a record of achievement, a place to which he could return from business or from errant pleasure, finding it unchanged except for change so gradual that it was almost imperceptible, like growth of vines or landscaped shrubbery or dogs or children. Then earthquake-sudden, the stability was gone, the permanence was gone. A gust of wind plastered dead leaves against the windshield, wiped them off again. It was Candace, then, in whom the permanence had centered. She should have told me, he shouted to himself, and anger like the November wind rattled through his bewilderment. The children were hers, she wanted them! She wanted the house out here in the country. If she knew she had to die—his hands shook at the smooth rim of the wheel. No use. He couldn't get at Candace. He never had been able to. She'd taken only a further step into impregnability. But this step had destroyed the house, the life in it.

He turned right from the Post Road and climbed steadily until he reached stone entrance pillars and a winding road. The meadow up the hillside flamed rust and wine under the gray sky, sulky fire of summer's ending, then evergreens on the terraces in front of the house hid the color. As he stepped from the car he heard voices, Bill beginning low expostulation, rising to shrillness, and little Candace shrieking reply. He hesitated a moment; Candy sounded her wildest. Then, shrugging, he went into the house. He didn't want them in

die could do. If he called to them, he'd have to order them to go somewhere, do something. Let them fight, if they got into a fight out of it. Candy certainly bullied Bill. Little hellion. What about Frances, anyway? She might look out for her little ones.

The house was astonishingly quiet, after the subdued bustle of the past days. Could it be possible, ecstatically possible, that they'd all gone and left him to himself? He slipped off his ulster, twitched his eyes away from the band of crêpe on the sleeve of his gray coat, and looked about the hall. No. There on the bench lay garments, black furs, black coats, hats. He straightened his long, lean body, ran a hasty hand over dark, heavy hair, felt in a vest pocket for a cigar, broke four matches before he had it lighted. Come on, remorse. Silently he walked across the Sarouk rug, pushed aside the velvet hangings at the door, and looked in at the living room. Logs burned slowly behind the brass fender of the fireplace, lights glowed under parchment shades, yellow chrysanthemums, their outer petals brownish, bent in a tall vase on the piano. Why the hell hadn't someone thrown them out? He crossed slowly to a chair near the fireplace and sat down.

"I thought I heard you come in."

He flicked ash from his cigar deliberately before he turned his head. Doris stood just inside the folds of portières, looking at him, her face, her hands, the soft collar of her blouse white accents on her black suit, under her black hair. Only her hands, smooth-fleshed over fine bones, betrayed anything but calmness. They moved, fingers feeling slowly along their interlaced lengths.

Arnold made as if to rise. "Don't bother." Doris came swiftly across the room, small, sleek head well back, slender body graceful under the severe lines of her suit, and sat down on the padded arm of the fender, near him. "I wanted to see you first. They're having tea. Do you want some?"

"God, no," said Arnold. "What do you want? The way she wears her hair, combed back in smooth waves from that white parting, makes her face perfect ovate. Where does she look like Candace? For she does."

"I want little Candace. She's so young. Candace meant me to have her, if anything happened. Only, like everyone, she didn't know. She left no word."

Arnold stared. He shifted his long legs, inspected his cigar, and drew in smoke.

"I can manage very well. I'm making enough... I've room..." Her restless hands were caught between her knees, only the square thumbs visible, the nails white from pressure.

"Thank you so much," said Arnold. "But I'll keep my own child."

"You—" The smooth oval of her face changed, cheekbones prominent, chin thrust forward. "You don't know what to do for a child. Her food, her clothes, her play—Candace always did everything—"

"Of course. It was her job, wasn't it?" Arnold stirred, resenting the scorn under dark brows so like Candace's. If he could get her down! "There are plenty of women I can hire. Plenty of schools to send her to. And I prefer that." His smile was quick with triumph. "I can explain why, if you insist."

Doris held a clenched fist a moment against her mouth. "Let's not quarrel." Her voice was strangled. "Because of Candace. You can put the older children in schools. But the little one—she's just a baby. She'd be so lonely. She was devoted to Candace. I could make up to her a little. See, Arnold, I am entreating, very humbly. I loved Candace. She wanted me to have the baby. She said so. You haven't time for the child."

"You can't really think I'd let you have a child of mine!" Arnold pushed himself erect. There was heady delight in this chance to even up old scores; he felt alive again. "Even if

Candace had left solemn word you were to have her—and she never mentioned it to me—I should refuse.” His smile now flashed brilliant warning: ask why if you dare!

“I know of course that you dislike me.” Doris’s voice deepened into rich, living anger; her pallor, the shadows under her dark eyes, the strain above the fine brows were all intensified, as anger shimmered over her like light. “Can’t you put that aside and think of the child’s welfare? You know my training, my experience qualify me to take care of a little girl as she grows older.”

“It is exactly her welfare I am considering. Not my personal feeling. Suppose we let it rest there.” Not that she would; she had the Langley stubbornness. She was holding herself in well; he could see tension in the forward thrust of shoulders. Strife like this was the converse of making love, with some of its sensuous excitement. “I hesitate to say more.”

“No, you don’t! You’re trying to make me angry.” She brushed a hand over her forehead. “Just for a few years, Arnold. Till she’s old enough for boarding school. Oh, what can I say to make you see? You can’t bring up a child, a man like you.”

“You can’t bring up my child, a woman like you.” He drew back a little in his chair. “You’d try to make her hate me, for one thing. You think I don’t know how you tried to alienate Candace? You might even turn the child into something like yourself. If I may be frank, I shouldn’t care for that. You’re too modern, too emancipated for my old-fashioned tastes.”

“You’re wrong about Candace. I never dared mention you, for fear I might betray what I thought of you. You were always afraid I might tell tales, weren’t you?” Doris had lost the rigidity of tension; her anger rushed out in swift words. “I didn’t need to tell Candace. She understood you well enough, although she pretended to you, to me, to everyone—

She died of you, finally! She needn't have died, my sister—She shouldn't have had children, after Bill. She knew it. Candy, and the baby she lost. That's what killed her."

"I didn't want her to have children!" Arnold cried out.

"You know why she had them! When I told her she couldn't have another, she said, 'I must have something.' She had nothing in you, you see."

"I don't believe she said that!" Arnold flexed his fingers, thinking, I'd like to shut them around that throat of hers! "You can't blame me if Candace had a passion for motherhood, more than for me. Some women are like that. I'm not a brute." (Why should he of a sudden remember Candace, years ago—who was the girl that time? that little bookkeeper in the office?—saying, "Forgive you? That's just a word. I don't know what it means. I'm frightened. You've shown me there's nothing but emptiness where I thought there was a live thing, growing." He had coaxed her, he had sworn he loved only her, he had begged her not to be so cold and hard, and she had said, "It takes a little time to get used to such emptiness." That was before Frances was born.) But Doris knew nothing; she was just firing in the dark, hoping to injure him. "You exaggerate my sins. You don't understand men very well. You pretend to be a little prude, but I wonder, sometimes—"

"Men! When my life is spent with women and what men have done to them! Dear God, it's good to tell you at last what I think of you! Old-fashioned tastes! In what? In women? You're what a woman fears and hates most in a man. You haven't the faintest conception of what loyalty or faithfulness or love mean. You're handsome and charming—I thought you were marvelous when Candace married you. And you're selfish and bigoted and self-indulgent. You don't even know what you lost in Candace. She was capable of great love, and you couldn't take it. You had to amuse yourself



like a silly boy with sex in corners. I could pity you, knowing the life you might have had with Candace, but I've grieved so for my lovely sister that I have no pity left. There are plenty of men like you, but there are fewer women to tolerate you. You're an old model, Arnold, a last century male, and you ought to be scrapped!" Doris got suddenly to her feet, with a long shivering breath. "I've done it now," she said, and walked away from the fireplace to stand, her hands braced against the edge of a long table, across which she stared at Arnold. The light thrown up from the table lamp altered the planes of her face, emphasizing chin, lines from nostrils to mouth, hollows under cheekbones, revealing exhaustion. "If you had let me have Candy. It's criminal to leave her with you. What kind of a woman will she grow into—"

"By God, it won't be your kind!" Arnold held himself quiet in the chair, one knee bent over the other, fingers biting into his ankle; he wouldn't give her the satisfaction of guessing at the fury which burned red behind his eyeballs. "If you've finished your harangue, suppose we separate. I can't find words fit to use under my own roof to tell you what I think of you. Since the house is mine, the going must be yours."

"And in the end, you win." Doris straightened her body, stepping back from the table. "You needn't throw me out. I'm going."

A brisk step in the hall froze the two of them. Arnold's eyes hurried about the room, as if he sought a hiding place. Unseemly shreds of this battle must be visible. He needed a few minutes— But already his sister thrust her head between the curtains, followed it with her firm, vigorous person.

"There you are," she said, looking first at Arnold, then at Doris, nibbling speculatively at her upper lip. "I thought I heard voices. Would you like tea, Arnold? No— Don't get up. I'll take this chair." She settled herself opposite him.

"There's no use your going this minute, Doris. There isn't a train till six, and Charles ordered a taxi. You can go along with us."

How much had she overheard? Arnold watched her, his heavy brows drawn together. Lena was shrewd, and there was, he suspected, no love lost between her and Doris. He had his usual impatient thought about Lena, that she'd be a good looking woman if she only took pains with herself. That black dress was badly cut, so that her hips and shoulders looked too heavy, and her dun hair was sifting down about her ears, sticking out of the knot at the nape of her neck. She acted as if her looks didn't matter, and once when he'd spoken about it, she'd laughed. "The kind of pains you mean take time and money, and I've too many other uses for both of those." He supposed a professor didn't get much, and with four children— She had fine eyes, as blue as his own, well set, and a wide, firm mouth, with a hint of dissatisfaction in the faint lines about them. Arnold would have said he was fond of her; wasn't she his sister? But there was no intimacy between them: he never thought of her except when at intervals they met. As a small boy he had fought tooth and nail to escape her elder-sisterly domination, and caution bred of that struggle had built a wall of impersonality between them. Charles wasn't the kind of a fellow he cared for, although Candace had liked him. For a brief moment Arnold had regret, not clearly defined, that he couldn't turn to Lena, couldn't, for example, tell her of the outrageous scene Doris had made. He rocked his foot slowly, hand still tight about the ankle. Nothing Lena would like better than a chance to barge into his private affairs. It was only that he was so damned upset. Doris had turned away from Lena's inspection, her body drooping.

"Of course, Arnold—" Lena's eyes met his—"if you'd like me to stay for a few days, Charles could manage. I left so

hurriedly. Or I can come back. I realize Doris has to get back to her work. Something would have to be done about outfits for the children, when you have decided on their schools. I was looking over their clothes, and apparently Candace hadn't seen to their winter things yet. I can take Candy to town with me. Perhaps that would be best. She could have Anne's room until Christmas."

"Why don't you both take all the children!" Arnold set both feet hard upon the floor. His anger against Candace sprayed over Lena, too. "I'm only their father. I have no rights in them. Here's a house, with servants enough. Why are you so hell-bent on dragging them out of it?"

"Good gracious, Arnold, no one wants to drag them anywhere. I thought you wanted to place them all in schools. You aren't very heavily paternal, so far as I've ever noticed."

"I don't know what I am, nor what I want to do." Arnold's hands were restless, badgered. "How can I—there's been no time—" If only Doris would take her white face out of the house!

"I know." Lena's eyes darkened. "I'd like to help, that's all. You see, when it's a question of children, you can't wait. Things like the house, like Candace's own possessions, they'll stand waiting till you have time for decisions, till you're farther away from the shock. It's different with children. You can't just put them aside till you feel like tackling them."

"Where are they?" Arnold tried to sound reasonable, calm. "They might as well take part in this. Where's Charles? Doesn't he know about schools?"

"Frances is upstairs. I think the other two went out to feed the rabbits. It's dark, they should be in."

"Let me find them." Doris was gone, swiftly, as she spoke.

"What had she been saying?" Lena dropped her voice.

"You looked so queer when I came in."

"Oh, nothing much." Arnold hesitated, and then reached

for Lena's disapproval to help belittle Doris. "She wanted to carry off little Candace. To bring her up."

"What? Arnold, you wouldn't consider it?" Her words were staccato.

"I certainly would not. She turned pretty sour when I refused." There would be comfort in adding details of the attack, except that he wasn't entirely sure how far Lena's response to them would contain comfort. She had a sharp tongue, and once or twice she'd given him a dig, sly rather than deep.

"Why, she'd ruin the child. All her radical ideas and strange friends and the things her mind must be full of from her work. I never heard anything more ridiculous! We don't really know a thing about her life, except that she has that apartment all alone, and is a doctor. Not that I object to a woman having a career if she can't get married. But to take a child into that life—" Lena laughed. "I was just thinking, I suppose it isn't very nice, that it would be a long time before her special field would help her much in bringing up a little girl. I hope you were frank with her."

"I was," said Arnold, grimly. "In fact, we both were." Perversely, he found that Lena's comments shoved him toward defense of Doris. "I think she meant well. She was very fond of Candace."

"You'd never dream they were sisters." Lena stopped, and Arnold, glancing at her, saw in her altered expression, in an unwilling, startled air of listening, that the flow of her thought, like his, had snagged against the fact of death. It was queer, the way you talked along, almost forgetting the cause for all the talk. Candace was dead. Was it grief, this blankness, this sudden jarring interruption? Lena sighed.

"Well, you just say no, and that ends it. They have good schools now, and a little discipline will be good for Candy. She's rather out of hand, and no wonder, with Candace not

well for so long. It hasn't been very easy for you, has it?" Her inquiry was kindly; for a moment her imagination moved toward him, as if she doubted that the casual, rigid conception of this man, her brother, long familiar and not known, was all inclusive. Arnold felt a brief impulse to meet her, to say, "You don't believe I made Candace unhappy, do you, that I am responsible for her death?" Then he shrugged restively. The unnatural strain of the past days was making him incautious and sentimental. He'd regret it later if he gave Lena any loophole.

"Candace was remarkable. Her ill health never interfered with the way she managed things. As for Candy, she's all right. She's got a will and a temper, but why not. So have some of the rest of us." I'm not so beaten down that you can get by with criticism, his manner announced.

Lena relaxed, dangling nose-glasses on a finger tip. Her face regained its usual expression, the mouth curved faintly upward at one corner, in a hint that she knew plenty she wasn't at the moment saying.

"I'll take Charles's advice about the schools, if he has any. He ought to know more than I do, anyway."

"I don't see where he is." Lena glanced at her wrist watch. "If we're going to make plans . . . *and* catch that train . . ." She crossed to the doorway and looked into the hall. "Charles!" she called. "Oh, Char-les!"

A door opened somewhere, a little tide of conversation flowed out, ebbing before the words reached Arnold. A laugh, several voices. He thought: they aren't talking about any of this. Tea, food; there's nothing more they can do, they hurry into shelter behind commonplaces, just as presently they hurry away, again into shelter of their own houses, their own affairs.

"Did you want me, Lena?" That was Charles, in his slow, light voice.

"We haven't much time. I thought you were coming right after me."

"Lester was telling a new Coolidge yarn. He says—"

Arnold saw Lena's gesture interrupt her husband's amusement. "Arnold wants to ask you about schools," she said, producing Charles as she turned back into the room.

"Oh, yes, yes, I didn't realize—" He glanced at Arnold. "I didn't know you had come in." His tone conveyed apology. He crossed to the fireplace and stood, one foot on the fender, hand in pocket, his tall body slouched, head thrust forward, the strong hook of nose accentuating the thrust, gray hair a crest above the square forehead.

"I thought you might have some suggestions. Schools are more your line than mine." Arnold shifted his feet, resisting an impulse to stand up, not to be stared down at. He concealed, almost from himself, entirely he thought from anyone else, a certain lack of ease the fellow put over on him. They had nothing in common. Arnold regarded with suspicion a concentrated intellectual preoccupation. "It will be better for the children if I pack them off at once."

"They're all in the village school now?" Charles had the dispassionate reflectiveness of a man who does not intend to be responsible for consequences. "Candace was on the school committee, wasn't she? I remember talking with her last summer."

Arnold remembered. He had been vaguely irritated that his wife should serve on a committee with Moriarty, who looked like a prize fighter but who wrestled only with furnaces he installed, and the postmaster, and the village carpenter. His irritation had expressed itself in light jeering opinion, and she had said in mild irony, "They really value my opinion, and you've no idea how I enjoy that! We've picked two of the best teachers the school ever had for next year, and even got the budget increased. You thought the school wasn't good

enough for the children. Why is it so funny for me to work at improving it?"

"I didn't say it was funny." He had been impatient. "But where you have so little energy—"

"Of course—" Charles interrupted Arnold's thought—(Would he, the rest of his life, hear these fragments of scenes, consider things he might have said, hear undertones he had missed?) "you can't just pick a school at random. The question of which school is good is entirely relative. Good for what? That is, what's the child want to do? Later."

"How do they know? Kids like that—"

"Charles just means college or not, or special training—like our Anne wanting some kind of art work, design, or advertising drawing." Lena watched the two men with restrained alertness. Curious, thought Arnold, the way her manner changed when Charles was near her. Alone she was composed, caustic, realistic, almost hard. In his presence she was discreet and wary, delicately aware of his effect upon the observer, and about her was this air of force held in check, of brilliance behind shutters. That was it; her pride and affection set up a kind of radio-activity, and for human modesty she tried externally to be impenetrable metal . . . was it platinum? "Take Frances. She's almost through high school, isn't she? Well, is she going to college? If she is, you can't just send her to a finishing school. And Bill—hasn't he any ideas?"

"Frances doesn't want to go to college. A pretty girl like that!"

"You are an old fogey, Arnold!" Lena's brows lifted. "She may have brains, too. I suppose you think college might be of use to Bill? Where are the children, anyway? I thought Doris went for them."

"Bill isn't much of a book-worm." Arnold frowned, one foot jerking in quick rhythm. How did he know what any of them wanted? School was just school, where other people did

proper things for the children, until presently they were grown up. "He could come into the business with me. Not that he cares much about it. But Lord, at his age! All he cares about is having himself a good time. And the last time I heard Candy mention her future, she was going to be a vet. Shall we send her to a training school for horse doctors? Of course, she's only eight—"

"In other words, you just haven't ever considered their futures." Lena did not glance at Charles, but Arnold, exasperated, knew that fleetingly, in that inner brightness, she compared them.

"Except to make sure there was plenty of money. That is primarily my rôle." For an instant his throat thickened, self-pity curdling in his veins. "After all, they did have a mother."

Charles had withdrawn into complete silence until that last remark, which again startled the three of them back to the cause of their presence here together in the house this late fall day. His eyes met Arnold's with grave kindness. "I tell you, why not just pick a good general preparatory school, at least for the two older. Then you'd be ready for anything. I know one or two head masters. Suppose I get them on the 'phone tonight, after we reach town. The best schools may have no vacancies. It's late. But I can explain the urgency."

Arnold relaxed, unexpectedly grateful. The fellow was really a decent sort. "Thanks," he said. "I'd appreciate it." He stopped, at an influx of sound, indistinct disturbance somewhere in the house. Was that Candy shrieking again? He'd evidently have to collect the children himself. As he strode into the hall Frances came flying down the stairs at breakneck clatter. "Here, where are you going? What's up? I sent word I wanted to see all three of you. Can't you look out for Candy a little?"

Frances checked her flight by an arm crooked about the polished cap of the newel post. "I am looking for her." Her



voice was hostile and tired, perhaps her throat ached. She kept her face averted, but Arnold saw the swollen eyelids, the grim little mouth, "I—I think I heard her yelling." She started down the hall, and at Arnold's, "You ought to keep an eye on her," she crouched tensely, pushing at the door. "I couldn't stand it, all those relatives eating and drinking as if—" she had the door open, she jerked her head high as she choked. Her fair hair was ruffled, fine ends raying out to catch the light. "And then you didn't come home. I didn't know when you would come. I had to go upstairs."

"I didn't know you wanted me, Frances." Arnold followed her down the rear hall toward a crescendo of disturbance, located behind the kitchen door. Frances flashed around at him, a queer exasperation on her white face. But she said only, "Oh, dear! Listen to her!" and burst open the door.

Hang it all, thought Arnold, what am I being blamed for? Then he saw his son at the sink, head over a basin of incarnadined water, Doris with an arm about his chunky shoulders, splashing water from the faucet against his face, and Candace twisting and wailing in the ineffectual grasp of Hulda. "Bill, darling Bill, will you ever forgive me? Bill, speak to me!"

"Aw, shut up," said Bill, wetly.

"There, that's stopping. Don't sniff, that's a good fella. You better come lie down for a bit."

"Noldy!" Candace had opened her eyes for an instant, and seen her father. She wrestled out of the flushed Hulda's grasp and hurled herself at Arnold, arms tight about his waist. "Noldy, I didn't mean to hit him, I thought I killed him, he won't forgive me ever ever ever!"

"It's just a nose bleed," said Doris. "Can you make her stop her noise? I haven't had time. Have you got a clean white rag, Hulda? Something soft."

"Here." Arnold pulled a handkerchief from under Candy's

clutch. "Now pipe down, Candy. Stop it." He shook her shoulder gently. Her thin body quivered against him in spasms of winded sobbing, she pressed her face hard against his ribs, under one arm, and cried more softly. "Are you all right, Bill?" The boy tipped his head back, his nose crimson and swelling in his drenched face, hair in wet peaks about square forehead and ears. "Whatever happened?"

"Aw, nothing. Stubbed my toe." He patted his father's handkerchief to his upper lip, looked at it with some disappointment that the flood was ended. "Say, lookit that basin! I bet I bled quarts!"

Candace shuddered, sniffled, pushed away from her father to look up at him, her face tragic, her eyes brilliant from tears. "Is he all bludgy?" she said. "I can't bear to look."

Doris was washing her hands, cuffs pushed back from supple wrists. "You might have done more damage than you did," she said flatly.

"Aw, never mind," said Bill. "What's the use of going back and prying into something when it's all right? She didn't mean—"

"You may as well own up, Candace." Arnold held her shoulder firmly, thinking how small, how smooth her bones feel under my fingers. "Here I've been waiting to consult with you all about school and such important things, and you have no more regard— No, wait a minute, Bill. What have you been up to?"

"She just tripped me, that's all."

"Of course, I happened to see," said Doris. "I was looking for you."

Candace ducked her head a trifle, peering under her long lashes at her aunt's grave face. Then she drew a long breath, edged closer to her father, snuggling her shoulder into his hand. "You see—" her small face was plaintive, beseeching—"I was lonesome an' I couldn't find anybody to do anything,

and Bill wouldn't let me be with him. He hid. And I found him and he ran away again and I found him."

"Poor baby." Arnold looked down where her grubby fingers twisted at a vest button. "Why didn't you look out for her, Bill?"

Bill's face was scarlet. "She was all right, Dad. Only tagging me all round. I didn't want to play. I felt funny. I just wanted to sit down by myself."

"Sit down, Bill." Doris pushed a chair against his legs and he doubled into it. "Go on, Candace."

Arnold held the child protectively. Damn Doris anyway! She expected to prove something... about the child, about him.

"All she did—" Bill spoke up in a loud voice, wishing to make an end of the fuss—"was throw a chunk of wood and I stumbled and I hit my beak and that's all."

"I didn't mean to throw it, honest, Noldy." Wide-eyed, mouth tremulous. "It was in my hand and it flew out and he was running and he ran onto it and he fell down."

"Some day when you throw things you're going to hurt somebody or even kill them." Frances spoke with a kind of dull hopelessness. "You promised Mother—"

"He was running away from me." Candace grew tense again, and Arnold buckled his arm tight about her.

"No more of that," he said crisply. Over her head he looked at Doris, a hard, bold look, put on as shield. And under it he felt his eyelids hot, his throat dry with fear, a fear at his own helplessness. Dear God, if there were only someone to take these three. They impinged upon him, distinct and separate, each a person complete and whole, demanding from him—what he did not know, but already he had intimation that there were demands. Frances, blaming him that he had not come home directly. Bill—"I think Candace is sorry," he said, defying Doris to add any comment. "There's so little time left,

suppose we go into the living room and say no more about this. Charles and Lena must go soon, and we must talk over plans for your future. You feel up to it, Bill?"

"Yes, sir." Bill made a brief inspection of the state of his nose, pocketed the handkerchief, and got up, his feet boy-noisy. Arnold led the way, arm still about Candace. He was aware that after an irresolute instant Doris followed. Taking advantage of the children's presence. Had she no pride? "You sit close to me, Auntie Dee?" He heard Frances, in an undertone. Well, she'd have to go with Lena and Charles, and he hoped to God he'd never see her again.

The dining room doors stood open, and his old Aunt Margaret limped into the hall, leading out the rest of the cousins. The tap of her stick, the dry rustle of her black taffeta were minor accents of her displeasure that he had absented himself from the funeral baked meats.

"We are going, Arnold." Her eyes were bright and hooded in her wrinkled raddled face. "You don't seem to need us, although we are ready to do anything we can in this sad hour."

"Here's your coat, Mother." Glenna, her thick-set, middle-aged daughter, who moved in a shrinking sidle, expecting to be shouted or snapped at, held the garment.

Arnold, saying politely, "Thank you, but there's nothing you can do," thought: that broken hip has left her good and lame. Glenna's more frightened of her than ever. They met only at funerals. Aunt Margaret never missed one, no matter how remote the relationship. He suspected that her grief was well tempered by her satisfaction that at her age she still was mourner and not corpse. The hall was full of people, men and women whom he scarcely knew, sorting out hats and coats, murmuring things. A plump ruddy woman began to cry, kissing Candace. Arnold glanced at Frances, backed into a corner, her face held in blank rigidity. He hadn't noticed

how tall she had grown: he hoped she wouldn't be a strapper, like Lena. "Don't upset the children." He pulled Candace away from the plump teary one. "If you'll excuse me, I have to consult Charles and Lena before they rush for their train." He marshalled the children between the curtains into the living room, and his implacable stare had no effect on Doris, who followed.

"I began to think you weren't coming back." Lena turned from the window where she stood. "Quite a car Aunt Margaret's got, isn't it?"

The front door had opened, and the night sucked out people and their voices. Swiftly Doris crossed to the divan, and a little gesture of her hand drew Frances down beside her. "Move over," said Bill. "They's room for me too." Arnold opened his mouth to order them both away from there, into chairs of their own, and then shut it so hard his jaw sockets ached. Damn it all, was Doris trying to make another scene? Was she flaunting affection his children had for her? How much time had she spent, creeping about this house in his absence (no, not creeping; she was too bold for that word!), undermining the feeling the children had? And Candace, treacherously, concealing her presence, admitting it only when he picked up a clue, perhaps warning the children to say nothing. He dropped into a deep chair, and little Candace stood beside him, leaning against his shoulder. He was glad they'd had it out between them. No more dillydallying while she worked behind his back. They'd forget her fast enough, once they no longer saw her. Charles was looking at his watch.

"It's about your schools," he began, clearing his throat. "Your father asked my advice about where to send you, and I wondered if you had any ideas of your own about the kind of training you wanted. Our Anne, for example, wants to study art. I didn't know whether you had any special bent. In

the public school you get a general preparation. But the boarding schools are highly individualized. I mean finishing schools, or college preparatory, and so on." He ran on easily, in a kindly, informal platform manner. Lena admired him with her eyes. "Bill, do you know what you want to train for? And you, Frances? Candy's pretty young, of course."

"I like it where I go now," said Bill. "Next year I can try out for football."

"I told you they didn't have any ideas," said Arnold. "You pick out the places and I'll foot the bills." He was irritable, badgered by the spectacle of Frances with a hand in one of Doris's, of Bill sturdy and confiding beside her. But Frances was leaning forward to stare at him, bewilderment and incredulity leaping up in her face.

"You mean you want to send us away?" she said. "Away to boarding schools?"

"That seems the best plan, my dear Frances," said Lena. "The change will be good for you. Help you get adjusted. And of course you can't stay here with no one to look out for you." She was firmly sympathetic. "It's hard to accept things when they come so suddenly, but you are older than the others. You can help us arrange things."

Frances stared at her, at her father, and then turned for a moment to Doris.

"I'm sure your Uncle Charles can select a good school," said Doris slowly, "where you can have the training you wish. Not a finishing school," she ended.

"I don't want to go away anywheres," said Bill. "I like it here."

"I don't want to go away anywheres," echoed Candace shrilly. "I like it here, too! Noldy, we don't have to go away!" She pounded on her father's arm. "*Do we?*"

"Just for school," said Arnold, impatiently. "You wouldn't like it here, now." He saw Frances shrink back into the corner

of the divan, one hand to her mouth. Doris's tone when she said "Not a finishing school," rasped at his mind. What the devil—

"But here is where we live." Bill sat up straight, his crimson nose comical in his determined face. "All our things is here."

Candace pulled away from her father's shoulder and faced him, her thin body quivering, her blue eyes brilliant with fresh tears. "Noldy, here is where we live! We haveta stay here with the dogs and the rabbits and my cat and everything! Don't you want us to stay here?"

"Candy would be sort of lonesome if I went off to a boys' school," said Bill, earnestly. "She's used to tagging me around, and it's all right most of the time, if she wouldn't tag when I want to go off by myself. Anyways," he looked about triumphantly, "I thought this was our home."

Arnold's hands were lax against his knees. A bewildering, impenetrable fog of sadness swept over him. He thought, this is what Candace did for them. She tied them together, she made this their universe, they don't yet understand that she is gone, their universe is destroyed. What can I do? He couldn't lift his eyes to look at them, knowing that little Candace stood there, accusingly, that Bill sat over on the couch, assured his world still hung together. Then Frances spoke, her voice tired with all the ununderstandable weight of the day, her childhood and her struggle toward growth curiously mixed in its timbre.

"Perhaps Father doesn't want us to stay here."

Arnold lifted his head then, and anger burned his face. Was this Doris's doings, this louder repetition of that doubt, that accusation he had met earlier? "What do you mean?" he shouted. "What else have I but you children? I want only the thing that's best for you! Good God—"

"Then—" Frances looked at him, holding her face steady

against threatened tears— "Then I don't see why we can't just go on the way we are."

"Sure," said Bill.

"Frances, please!" Lena was hurriedly reasonable. "Won't you help us with the others? You are old enough to understand, even if they don't. We are suggesting a change, but only because everything is already changed. You know that. Suppose you try to stay here. You just waste time while you discover it won't do. You make yourselves unhappy. Arnold, tell them it's the only solution. It doesn't mean your father doesn't want you." Her glance at Arnold was peremptory, laden with the pressure of time, of a train to catch, with the unconscious irritation of an adult against young stubbornness. "They can come back for holidays . . . although probably camps in the summer—"

"I'm most as old as Frances." Bill's voice squeaked. "I'm plenty old enough so I know what I want. I want to stay with my folks." Emotion squeezed his face into a gargoyle.

Doris got up suddenly and ducked between the divan and Lena's chair, coming to a halt at one of the French windows, her back to the room, her head well up, hands pressing back some fresh upsurge of feeling.

Candace drew away from her father, step by step, until she bumped against Frances's knees, and edged beside her on the divan. Three of them, their eyes all on Arnold. The room was very still, and as they sat there, dissimilar and yet alike, the likeness deepened, until they seemed no longer separate but aspects of some inner unity. Candace had done this for them, thought Arnold again, and they fought now to retain the security her love had built for them. But Candace was gone. I've had little part in it, thought Arnold. How can I keep them here? They were sitting in judgment upon him, their eyes said, see, it's up to you, you can keep us from losing too much. For an instant, which unrolled endlessly, he tried to



envisage life, his future days. Wasn't Lena right, it would be easier for them—

The doorbell rang, the children moved more closely together, their eyes turning to the hall through which Hulda passed.

"It's the taxi." Lena stood up. "Charles, my coat, please. Here we sit, deciding nothing, and now it's time to go. Yes, Hulda. Tell the man we'll be out at once. Charles must just go ahead, looking out for places at good schools, and you can convince the children that it's impossible for them to stay here. It's very well to consult children—" Lena's color was high—"but after all, older people know better. They've got to have someone watching out for them, someone responsible—" She broke off, somewhat confused at her implication.

"You mean I'm not?" Arnold jumped to his feet. Doris turned from the window.

"Are you?" she said. Her voice was heavy with the tears she had not shed. "I know how they feel. They want to keep each other and the good life Candace made for them. But it was Candace—"

Lena drew black gloves over her firm, large hands. "We must go. Charles has to get that train."

"Just a minute." Arnold's voice snarled a trifle, blood roared in his ears. The children sat erect, as if he jerked invisible wires. "I may be incompetent, irresponsible, all the things you're implying. But by God, if my children want to stay here, stay they will. You hear?"

Lena shook her head, but Charles laid a hand on her arm. "He's right, I think," he said, quietly. "If Arnold wants to tackle it, I'm all for him. Good-night. Coming, Doris?"

Doris's feet lagged. She looked at Arnold, lips compressed against the entreaty in her eyes. Then with a gesture of helplessness she went out of the house.

"I'll run up for a day soon," said Lena, hastily. "There are all her things to go over."

"I'll see to them." Arnold felt his rage running out of fingertips, leaving him heavy with weariness. "But come when you have time."

Then they had gone, the taxi churned up gravel and roared a moment before it drove away, and Arnold dropped back into his chair, hands limp. The children were still silent, hushed with awkwardness after too much exposed feeling. "We won't discuss it further," said Arnold. "You'll go back to school on Monday. You better go now and have Hulda get you supper."

They filed out, and he heard them whispering in the hall. Then Frances stood in the doorway. "We just wanted to say we're very much obliged. I'll try to look out for them, so they won't be a trouble to you."

Arnold nodded. He should say something paternal, encouraging, but he was too dull to find words, and after an instant Frances slid away. He sat inert, fragments of the day revolving slowly in his head. It was impossible to think ahead, to plan. The flow of time, easy and unobserved, was blocked, and moment after distended moment piled up against the obstruction like logs jamming, until it seemed that he would never move ahead into casual, ordinary days. Not yet seven. Twelve more hours before it would be seven in the morning. Once he got back to work—"You don't even know what you have lost." Sixteen years he'd lived with Candace—and through those years she had withdrawn from him, steadily, quietly, until her death was only the last step which took her distant figure over the hill. He knew her, he knew what he'd lost. His anger against Doris smouldered, lacking energy for any violence. He got to his feet and crossed the room to the French window. At least Doris had heard the children choose to stay with him. Oh, fool! He groaned, fumbling at the latch. They didn't choose you! Little animals, instinct-moved to resist change. He pushed aside the curtain and stepped out on the

terrace. A wind had come up; the dark night spoke of restlessness, of haste. Leaves made a dry and crackling eddy about his feet, then lifted and whisked away. Trees rattled their boughs, the wind tore at their crisped leaves; Arnold could see the motion vaguely against the sky where clouds over a hidden moon ran like waves with swiftly changing hollows of light. The trees twisted and wrenched as if they too would hurry away. The restlessness, the flight drew Arnold out like a thin wire to share the mood. An imitation of life, a pretense, this whirling of dead leaves. A last frenetic flight from the death that lay in winter. He trembled, feeling without words his own life no more than such a whirling flight. Was he going a little mad? He tried to shrug off the feeling, to clamber back to the surface where he was accustomed to dwell, and the surface, thin ice, splintered under his fingers, leaving him submerged in strange waters.

"Noldy! Noldy!" Candace's voice mounted to a shriek. "Where are you!"

The curtain concealed the opened window. Hastily Arnold brushed past it. "What *is* the matter?" He drew the window shut.

"Oh." Candace ran at him and shook his arm. "I thought you'd gone away and left us. I couldn't see you. I didn't want you to go away."

"I didn't. What you want?"

"Supper's ready, Hulda says. And there's somebody on the 'phone wants to speak to you. A lady." She tipped her head, rolling her eyes up at him.

"Shut the door into the dining room," said Arnold abruptly, resenting something in that look of hers. Good Lord, he was as suspicious as a woman! But he waited until she had closed the door before he sat down at the telephone stand.

"Arnold? I had to call you!" That husky full voice—"Not a word all these days. Are you all right?"

"Of course." Damn it, Isabelle had no business calling him here! And today of all days!

"You must be frightfully tired, poor boy. If only I could see you."

"I don't know when I can see you." Cross impulses made jackstraws in his head. She thought because his wife was dead—God, what did she think? What did he think? "But see here, don't call me at the house."

"I knew you couldn't call me—I had to hear your voice, darling."

"I can't talk now." Was that door into the dining room ajar? And those three listening? What of it? This was his own affair, not theirs.

"When will you come? Tomorrow? I can't wait forever!" Her voice was urgent, possessive, and Arnold sat upright, hackles rising. Confound her, had she no taste?

"I'll give you a ring as soon as I'm free. Things are pretty difficult. You might understand that. Good-night." He hung up the ear-piece, the tones of her voice dropping futilely from it until it clicked into place. Outrageous of her to think she could assert a claim upon him tonight, in this house. And curious that what might have pleased him with Candace living became intolerable at this hour. She had no imagination, no softness. Hard, shallow, self-seeking, passionate, the quality of her personality was for a moment tangible as actual savor on his tongue. Suddenly, as if glass broke and fell clinking all about him, he experienced a minor shock. This, too, was changed. It was one thing to play around when your situation defined limits past which you never would go, limits your companion tacitly accepted. Candace had stood between him and any consequences. But now— He rose slowly, grim surprise in his eyes and mouth. That warm possessiveness in Isabelle's voice— Had she already considered this change as

significant to her? He'd have to watch his step. Isabelle and his children?

He pushed open the dining room door, and the brisk talk he had heard indistinctly stopped abruptly, Bill clapping his lips together over words almost out, Frances bending hastily over, pretending to rescue her napkin. Talk about him, then? Nonsense, what could they know? Arnold sat down, hitching the heavy maple armchair up to the table. Whatever Candace had known, she had kept inviolable the conception which the children had of him. Arnold could not have said why he knew this. And he'd been always discreet. Oh, it had been just some childish talk they were embarrassed to continue. Frances sat across from him, but she had often sat there the past year when Candace was not well enough to come down. The three of them were looking at him, their eyes tentative, waiting his cue as to what they should now do or say. Bill offered him a soap-shiny face, nose still reddened, as augury of his best intentions.

"This looks like good cold chicken," said Arnold, beginning to serve. Hulda came in with cups of hot cocoa, her tear-blotched face more composed now that she had work for her hands. "That wind sounds as if it might blow up another storm." What did you talk about? (And what were they saying so busily when he had come in? Was it possible that here, too, Candace had stood between him and consequences, had built for them a proper picture of him, under cover of which he would do as he chose and now he was exposed, they were at him directly.) Bill was telling a story about two deer he had seen at twilight the previous day, with Candy ardent for details.

"They ran like this—" Bill made great loops with his arm, and Frances caught his glass of water. "They looked as if they didn't touch the ground, just hit the air."

"I heard shooting today," said Arnold. "I must get new signs to post on our land. You could tack them up, Bill."

"Would they shoot our deers?" cried Candy.

"Not if we are well posted." Arnold relaxed, and the talk went on, with little lulls, with new effort from one or another of them. Plucky kids. He'd been an idiot to think them suspicious or critical of him. They were his children, that was all. His nerves were edgy, after the day. And why not?

After supper Frances read for a time to the other two, a chapter from *Treasure Island*. Her clear voice, with its subdued hint of grief, followed Arnold as he moved restlessly about the house. If he sat still his legs began to jerk. Then it was bedtime for Candy. "You all better go," said Arnold. "We'll feel better after a night's sleep." He watched them trailing up the stairs. Later he thought he heard crying, and stepped into the hall to listen. Nothing. He went to the buffet in the dining room and poured a stiff drink, thinking, as it warmed him, that he must call up his bootlegger the next day. Then he tried the latch of the front door, snapped out his lights, and climbed the stairs.

The door of Candace's room was shut. He stood outside it, thinking that it was very long since he had opened that door at night. He could see the room, with its clear yellow walls, its white hangings, the chaise longue beneath the row of windows. He could go in now, could move about at will searching out all Candace's secrets, her life in small tokens, a book, a letter, a drawer where she kept what she loved. She had left everything there, she was helpless against his intrusion. Helpless? Cold sweat sprang out on forehead and palms. It was he who was helpless. She was beyond his intrusion. Nothing that he did could matter to her now. He moved on, to close the door of his own room silently, not to disturb the stillness of the house.

The windows were patches of lighter gray, objects in the

room were indistinct when Arnold woke. There was no moment of haziness, of troubled adjustment to an altered situation; his thoughts moved on, continuous with the night before, as if the blankness of sleep had never intervened. He supposed there were plans to be made, practical matters to settle. As he thrust his feet out of bed, groping for slippers, dismay made his blood sluggish, his movement slow. Why had he agreed that the children might stay? Look at today, Saturday. What would they do with themselves? He couldn't stay here, playing nursemaid. He had to get to the office. Lena's idea about schools was the only sensible thing. He reached for his bathrobe and stood up, knotting the cord. He'd lost his temper, that was what, exasperated past endurance by the piling up of hints—stronger than hints—first from Doris, then from Lena, that he for one reason or another wasn't fit, wasn't competent to keep them. As he closed the windows he experimented with a scene in which he told the children that on the whole it seemed wiser— It wasn't too late— He could see the three of them, bound together by their desire, their eyes watching for him to speak. Why, he'd made a covenant with them. He couldn't let them down. No matter how appalling it looked for him in this gray morning light. He flapped along the hall to the bathroom. The house was cold. He'd asked Candace to jack up the furnace man. (Acidly, because he didn't think much of old Leonardo.) The water was none too warm. Everything disorganized. He bathed and shaved hastily. As he dressed he heard the children. Doors slammed, bare feet padded around. Someone pounded on a door. "Bill, have you gone to sleep in the tub? My goodness, you don't have to take all day!" Then later the sound of argument, soft and quick at first, with Candy's voice rising into, "I will too! I'm going to ask Noldy if I can't!"

A rush to his door, and he called "Come in," turning from the mirror, fingers tugging his tie into place.

"Noldy, can't I wear my red dress?" Candy hugged it to her flat chest, her feet doing a little tap dance of anger. "Can't I?"

"Candy, you mustn't bother Father!" Frances pulled at the child's arm.

"I want to wear it. It makes me feel better." Tears rolled down Candy's face.

"But it's your new dress, and you'll just spoil it, playing out doors."

"I don't want to play outdoors. I don't feel good. I want to wear my red dress. Can't I, Noldy?"

Arnold looked at Frances, pale with distress. "Why bother, just for today, Frances? If the child is unhappy, anything that helps—I shouldn't fuss about the dress."

Frances spun away, shoulders tense under her woolly bathrobe, and Candy, no more tears, cuddled her father's arm a moment before she wriggled into the red dress. Then she strolled along the hall, rocking her small rear impudently as she passed the door of Frances's room. A smile pushed at the corner of Arnold's mouth. Perhaps he should have backed up Frances. Still, she should learn not to make issues of trivial matters.

As he went downstairs he heard Bill whistling, and he thought: a child doesn't stay unhappy long. Today absorbs him, wipes out yesterday, and tomorrow doesn't exist for him. Frances was older. How far ahead could she look? He stopped for a moment, his hand sliding over the waxed surface of the mahogany stair rail, troubled by vague complexity of thought. You looked ahead only as you grew older. You had to have time behind you in order to feel it ahead of you. Was that what made death so peculiarly shocking, so feverishly unmeetable, that with it both past and future came crashing down, pinning you under the wreckage? What you remembered, what you expected equally destroyed? God, it was too deep for him!



He wasn't accustomed to thoughts like these. He went with hard thumps of his heels into the dining room. Time he got back to work, got his mind on facts, on tangible, familiar matters.

Beneath him Leonardo attacked the furnace. Arnold followed his steps by the variation in the clangor, shaking, scraping, rattling. "You tell that fellow," he said, as Hulda came in with the breakfast tray, "that he's got to turn up before noon if he wants to keep the job."

"Yes, Mr. Carlton." Hulda laid beside his plate morning paper and mail, brought from the village by the same Leonardo. Arnold flicked through the envelopes. Mrs. Arnold Carlton. Advertising circulars, request for funds from an orphan home: Arnold pushed them aside. She's gone, leaving no forwarding address, he thought, grimly. One letter for him, in firm round script. Wasn't that—yes. Dr. Doris Langley, West 22nd Street, on the flap. The children slid into their places, and he glanced up to nod them an absent good-morning. More interference. He tore it open.

DEAR ARNOLD:

There is a marionette show on Sunday afternoon to which I had promised to take the children, providing you agreed. It would divert them, and might relieve you to have them off your hands for the day. I can meet them at the noon train, as I have done before.

I am sorry about yesterday. If the children are to stay with you, these first weeks will be the hardest for them. I love them and I want so much to help. Surely we can bury our personal hatchet for them. I'll telephone the factory at noon.

D.

Arnold stared at the letter, his mind furnishing sentence after quick sentence of scathing response. So loud were the words in his ears that he did not hear the children until Candy

shrieked "Noldy!" His fingers tore the sheet into scraps as he lifted his head.

"Do I hafta eat my cereal if I don't want it?"

"She won't do anything right this morning!" Frances pushed back her chair, blinking very fast. "She's just ornery."

"Aw, go on, Candy!" Bill spooned up his own oatmeal. "Don't be a gup!"

"I'm not a gup! Only I don't want it!"

Arnold pushed fingers through his hair. "I should think," he said curtly, "you might let me have breakfast in peace."

Candy rolled her eyes at him, and then discreetly applied herself to breakfast, cereal and all. Frances edged her chair back to the table. Arnold stood the paper against the percolator, and settled behind it. Candy wanted an encore of the red dress, the little devil. His mind jerked back to Doris. Colossal effrontery! Enlisting the children, bribing them. She'd discover that when he said hands off, he meant just that. He folded the paper, finished his coffee, and rose.

"I'll be back as early as possible. There'll be a good deal to see to, I've been off so long. Remember, you chose to stay here. It's up to you to make a go of it."

As he pulled on coat and hat, thrust the paper into a deep pocket, felt for his keys, he was aware of them sitting quietly at the table, a pitiful uncertainty in their eyes. For a space they had been wholly in a natural present, and he had pushed them back into bewilderment. But what else could he do?

"Is your father gone?" Hulda came, a trifle breathless and red, to the door. "You're going, Mr. Carlton? What am I to do?"

"About what? Of course I must go. The factory doesn't run itself."

"*She* always planned out for me." Hulda pushed her hands under her apron, making a queer ridge over her stomach. "Meals and everything."

"Good Lord, you don't expect me to do that!" Arnold tried not to roar at her. "Haven't you—" he stopped, not adding "brains enough" as he had intended. If he hurt her dumb feelings, she'd probably walk out. "Haven't you been here long enough—you can remember—Frances will have to help you."

"How soon will you be sending the children away? Your sister—"

"They aren't going away. They're staying. And I'd like you to stay, too, because you know our ways. It won't be easy, just at first, but—" heartily—"I'm sure you can manage." Her round face was working; was she going to cry on his neck? Hastily Arnold moved for the door, flinging back a good-bye.

"Father!" Frances this time, hurrying after him. "Did Auntie Dee speak to you about tomorrow? She said she'd arrange about which train we should take. It's the marionette show, like that we saw last year." She spoke in a confidential tone, as if she said, See, I'm planning with you for the younger ones, I'm taking on a new rôle. At Arnold's frown she added, "Bill specially wants to see them, because he's been making some of his own."

"I am surprised you want to go to a show when it's not yet a week. It doesn't look right." Arnold was sorry he had seized that weapon when he saw how it crumpled Frances into confusion.

"I—I didn't think—I thought it would help them—I thought Mother would like—"

"And what about me? Do you think I'd like to be left alone here all day?" That was better; it restored a figment of the rôle Frances attempted. "You'll explain to Bill and Candy, won't you?"

"Yes, Father. If you want us here— But, Father"— A pulse beat in the soft hollow of her throat, perplexity tied a little

knot between her brows—"Is it wrong to let them do things—to go outdoors to play? Does that look right? If they don't, Candy will get to crying again—" She twisted her fingers into a tight fist between her small breasts and pulled her lips between her teeth.

"Of course that's all right." Arnold turned away, sadness pungent on his tongue. Poor kid. "The only thing to do is to keep busy." She's growing up, he thought: I ought to be able to talk to her, to help her. God, what could I say? Who knows what to say, how to act about death? "We have to go on living. The sooner we get back into harness, the better. It helps." Helps what? He couldn't add helps forget. Was that what he meant? "It's another matter, traipsing into town for the day. Your aunt knew I'd disapprove of that. Now I must really go. Do the best you can."

As he drove toward the factory he considered Frances. She was, then, old enough to try to figure things out. He had hurt her, suggesting that she lacked proper feeling about her mother. He had never thought of her as anything but a child, and a child on the whole less attractive than Candy, heavier, more serious. Just as well for him that Frances was the oldest and not Candy! She was conscientious, she had, he suspected, her own standards. Why, each one of them had his own life, had his head full of notions every waking minute, and he, Arnold, had scarcely a glimmer as to what they might be. Oh, well. He hunched his shoulders a trifle, hands firm on the wheel, as he negotiated the morning traffic. You couldn't take children too seriously.

More trucks on the road each week. The day might come when he'd do his long distance shipping by truck. Save all the wrangling about rates and empty freights when he needed them and delays in shipments. His thoughts slipped away from the past days and rolled, smooth as ball bearings, down accustomed grooves. By the time he reached his office he was,

for an instant, surprised at the sombre tentative air with which Miss Nichols, his secretary, greeted him, her eyes pecking at him behind her spectacles, her round, plain face held expressionless, waiting to follow his key.

"We've plenty to see to this morning, and just half a day for it." He was brusque, hanging up coat and hat with quick movements. (All the rest is behind me, leave it alone, it doesn't come into the office, said his manner.) "Any word from Fox yet? He promised to put through a good order for that new speedometer design." (He and Fox had celebrated that order the night Candace lay dying.) "Ah, yes. Here it is. Tell Wiggins I want to see him."

Wiggins, his head foreman, thick-set, wrinkled, had to peer at him curiously before with a faint sigh of relief he could drop into his ordinary blunt and intelligent treatment of news of the order. They all pried at him at first, not openly, to see how he was taking it, what change had marked him, how he wished them to act. No condolences. Get to work!

"Another order or two like that with time clauses in 'em and you'll have to put on a night crew." Wiggins' attitude toward the steady growth of the business had a strong tincture of skepticism. "Always more trouble at night. Girls sneaking off with fellows. Have to get a good night foreman. Won't start just yet, though. May not need to."

Arnold laughed. "I know." He quoted Wiggins' usual conclusion. "What you going to do when everyone that can afford a car has got one? Can't go on forever selling more. Then what'll happen to orders?"

Wiggins grinned at him. "Wait and see." He pulled at his cheek reflectively. "I'll see Bridges about stock. Try to get started on Monday."

A night crew. Arnold watched Wiggins' stocky shoulders out of the door. Already they'd doubled the number of hands. Not bad. And suddenly, as if the familiar identity of Arnold

Carlton, manufacturer of accessories, had waited here in this building, he donned it wholly, he had no personal life, nothing caught away a shred of attention from the details which crowded into the morning. He had his usual sense of satisfying power in moving at high speed from one interview to the next, from letters to telephone, back to plans for a new advertising campaign in trade journals, for a booth at the auto show.

When, just after the shrill noon blast of the factory whistle, Miss Nichols came in from the outer office to say, "Your sister-in-law, Dr. Langley, is on the 'phone," his hand reached for the instrument on his desk. Then it dropped, and his body slumped. He felt a twinge of nausea, wrenched too suddenly out of his smooth, swift, dominant self. "Tell her—tell her that the children can not go into the city tomorrow." Miss Nichols turned back; her mouth looked sorry. Damn Doris, dragging things into the office, so that Nichols had to remember about the children, had to pity him. "And I'm too busy to speak to her, in case she asks!" He strained to hear what Nichols said, beyond the closed door. It would be like Doris to insist. But the secretary did not come back until a half hour later when she brought in letters for his signing. No, she needn't stay longer. She stood at his elbow, blotting the signature, deftly whipping off each neat sheet. Presently she opened the door again, a dark bell-shaped hat endangering her spectacles, her fingers busy with large horn buttons on her gray coat. "I just wanted—I mean—I'm so dreadfully sorry, Mr. Carlton. If I could just do something to help—"

Arnold looked at her: she wouldn't have said a word if Doris hadn't called; she was flushed with embarrassment. But she meant it. He smiled, a slow, friendly smile. "Thank you," he said. "I'm sure you would. Work's the best medicine. You help there, all right."

"If you should think of anything." Her face had altered as

he smiled, relaxing, admiring him openly. "I have lots of time. Good-bye, then."

She was a nice girl, thought Arnold. Competent secretary, old enough to be past foolish notions, not that she'd ever had them with that plain, sensible face. Discreet, good watch dog, proud of the business, of him. He'd discovered long ago, after the very first, that bookkeeper, that it was a mistake to mix business and—well, pleasure. Eyes languishing over letter files, excuses to get into his office, and as the affair wore on, tears, threatened hysteria, everything that had no place in daytime hours. Women were queer that way; they didn't seem able to keep things separate. Well, Mary Nichols would lead no man astray.

The telephone rang. Arnold stared at it. Looked like a question mark. Isabelle wouldn't have the nerve—he wouldn't answer. But the ringing had compulsion, and he dragged it across the desk. This was the time she always called, after Nichols had gone, before he left.

"Arnold?" As sweetly as if he hadn't cut her off last night! "Are we lunching together? I saved it for you. I thought you'd call."

He could see her face, projected by the intimate richness of her voice, handsome, self-conscious eyes, heavy dark hair, rather ugly sensuous mouth. Less than a year since he'd first seen her, with an after-theater gang, among them an automobile agent he knew slightly, at that speak-easy on Fiftieth. He had liked her figure, the opaque creaminess of her skin, the bold appraisal with which she met his eyes, and presently the fellow agent, Jenkins, was welcoming Arnold into the group. Isabelle was celebrating her brand new divorce, she told him that night. She had a small apartment over-crowded with stuffed chairs and tables from her marriage, in the west Nineties, part of a floor in a remodelled private house; she was secretary in a down-town office. Arnold suspected that the city

held too many women like Isabelle, independent, thinking they had a right to take their pleasures lightly as men took theirs, refusing the old solid categorical division into good and bad. Not many weeks ago a careless phrase from him which showed too clearly that he at least still believed in the old categories—for women!—had sent Isabelle into a berserk rage. He had edged warily out of the door just as the platinum and diamond watch shattered against it. Well, she had said she was sorry, he had said he hadn't meant anything, and he'd had the watch repaired. But what he had meant was fully in his mind now, a bar laid against the prickle of excitement which her voice had power to stir. He had to be careful. Couldn't get involved with her—with his daughters to consider.

"I don't see how I can." Was it only last Saturday— Harshly Arnold rejected the pressure of remembered images, words, tones, sensation. That was another man! (Wonderful Arnold! Let's quarrel again. I like making up!) "I promised to get home as early as possible. There's everything to see to. And anyway I can't. Can't you understand that?"

"I thought perhaps I could help you." Her voice cajoled him warmly, he knew just how she held her head tipped so that her eyes would divert all attention from the large mouth, the too prominent teeth. "Arnold, I could help you forget, if you're unhappy. You don't have to shut me off. Wait there at the office, and I'll come out. It won't take half an hour. Or—if you must go home—let me come there. I must see you. I'm frightened, not seeing you. After all, this—this can't change us!"

"You can't come to the house. Are you mad?"

"You can come to mine, but I can't go to yours. Is that it?" Her voice twanged at the wires, too passionately, and Arnold moved the ear-piece away from his head.

"If you must have it straight," said Arnold, "I don't wish to see you."



Silence for a moment, and then, "What is this? An attack of conscience? It's a little late, isn't it, now your wife is dead?"

"Oh, God, leave me alone! Can't you?"

Silence again, until a queer choked sound, thin and unmoving, thus separate from sight of tears and pallor and quick breath, came over the wire. "You are cruel! I love you and you are so cruel."

"I can't stand any more of this. If you had any sense of decency—"

She was crying now, with no words, and Arnold slid the receiver gingerly into the bracket, his mouth tasting of brass. She was angry, not hurt. She had thought, shrewdly, that she could rush his defenses before he had them strong enough to repel her, and that once she had coaxed him to see her, she could hold him. The moment she had heard that Candace was dead she must have planned— Arnold got to his feet, and leaned heavily on palms pressed on the flat desk. Preposterous, this intrusion into his private life! What he wanted was, exactly, never to see her again, never to hear her.

He might as well pick up luncheon before he went home. The children wouldn't expect him yet, and there would be all too much of the day left whatever time he arrived. He had a quick phantasy of himself stopping at the club. Drinks in the locker room—(How's that for Scotch? Straight off the boat!) the club's special luncheon, good, with two or three men, a round of Kelly pool. No. Couldn't be done. His presence would embarrass his friends. They'd look at him askance, subduing their talk, unable to fit him in. Just when you needed diversion, occupation most, you were supposed to withdraw from any chance at it. Grimly Arnold considered that the convention of a period for mourning might be less a protection for the mourner than for his acquaintances. Stay away with your loss until the flesh has healed over the wound. Don't remind us that such things happen to us. Nothing for him but

to go home and face it. The time between now and Monday morning stretched hair-fine, attenuated, endless.

He stopped at a small restaurant where no one knew him, made a hurried and indifferent luncheon, and drove homeward. As he climbed the road to the house meagre sunlight filtered through thin clouds, lying palely on the meadow, chillier than no sun at all, so without life-warmth it seemed. Again, returning to the house, he was ravaged by incredibility. It couldn't be true that Candace was gone. Terraces, evergreens, the circling drive, the house itself standing there, unaltered, and Candace not there? Arnold stopped the car. Beat your brains out against the fact, impenetrable, smooth, steel-hard, and the fact remained.

Arnold got out of the car and walked slowly to the house. If I had known that this was going to happen, began his mind. Well, what then? Would he feel any better now if he had been a paragon? He was no worse than other men. It had been Candace who had withdrawn from him, unforgiving, idealistic. At any rate, he told himself with vigor as he entered the house, you can keep away from futile regrets, remorse. Nothing more useless.

"Who's there?" Hulda's voice came belligerently through the door at the end of the hall, and at Arnold's answer, her face appeared in the narrow opening, door grasped as a shield, until she verified his identity. "Thank the Lord it's you at last, Mr. Carlton!" She came forward, her plump bosom agitated, the whites of her eyes visible around the irises. "All I can say is I can't stop alone in this house. Noises and footsteps and strange peddlers at the door planning who knows what, and no one for miles to hear me if I shouted out."

"What nonsense, Hulda!" Arnold tried to sound reassuring. "You've been here years and whatever happened? You had no one—Mrs. Carlton wasn't much protection."

"Ah, but it was different, knowing she was here. She always

knew what to do no matter what happened." Hulda stepped closer, peering up the stairs, dropping her voice. "I heard her walk about. Those slippers she always wore, with the low heels. It was her walk. Twice I came running, hearing her call me. Why wouldn't she be here, knowing her children need her, and never had she failed them? I won't stop here alone." Hulda was crying now, apron up to her face. "And the house makes noises when it's empty, like it talked to itself."

"Come, now, Hulda. You're just upset. We're all upset and nervous. You aren't going to desert us, are you?" Arnold wanted to shake her plump, heaving shoulder. What was she after, more money? He'd never exchanged a dozen words with her, outside of good-mornings and another cup of coffee, another slice of roast, a little less salt in the soup. "Just when we need you, the children especially. You're old enough to have some sense."

"I can't stop here alone, that's all, no matter what."

"What'll I do? Hire a cop to guard the house?" Arnold tried his slow smile, appealing to her humor, her loyalty. "You aren't alone now. I'm here. And the children—"

"Away all day at school and you at the factory." She mopped at tears. "It's too much work, all the housekeeping. She always planned for me."

"See here, are you holding me up for higher wages? That's taking a mean advantage, it seems to me."

"Oh, no, sir. I get good wages." She was indignant. "But away out in the country like this, and her dead and—"

"I'll tell you." Arnold whacked a fist into a palm, triumphant. His first domestic difficulty, and he solved it in a flash. He'd always said if women used their heads as men did in business—"We'll hire a second girl. You can boss her, she can help you, she'll be company, everything'll be fine. Is that what you want?"

"I don't know." At least her crying was checked. "We never

had a second girl. We might not get on. I don't know of anyone—"

"Stop raising objections and find a girl. Plenty of them. Call up an agency. You can pick her." Arnold dismissed the matter with a wave, and turned toward the living room. He knew Hulda's trouble, now. Her slow mind resisted change, struggled to hold to the familiar, was dismayed and ill-equipped for adjustment. He'd seen men in the factory like that. "Where are the children?" he asked.

"I don't know, sir." Hulda's brow was creased, her mouth pursed, lips moving a little, as if thought had to travel through her vocal cords before she heard it. "They were around till lunch time." Then, sharply, "I can't watch them every second and do my work too!"

"I just asked," said Arnold. "They're old enough to look out for themselves."

He laid a fire on the hearth, selecting smooth sticks from the woodbasket. He lighted it and sat in the deep chair, finger tips balanced with hard pressure. There were sounds in the house, Hulda was right. Like talking to itself. Faint contractions or expansions in the wood, movements in lathes under plaster, inexplicable soft and sharp notes, as if like an animate thing the house had steady constant life in all its separate cells. Where had the children gone? He'd come home because they needed him, hadn't he? And where were they?

Presently, unable to sit still longer, he hunted up a cap and belted jacket, and went out to walk about the grounds. The pale sun, low, far to the south, would soon drop below the hill. Ivy and fern in the rock garden were still green, but the frost had withered the last of the terrace flowers. Candace's flowers. He heard the children before he saw them, Bill with his amusing variation in pitch, Candy's impetuous, quick speech.

He walked around the house to watch them coming, with

the irregular quick pace of untired youth, Candy between the other two, skipping as they came. They carried bulky packages, their figures rushed at him like part of a frieze, and as they neared, the early twilight showed their eyes bright, their color high.

"Noldy!" Candy saw him first, and darted for him. "Have you been here very long? We thought we'd get home first."

"Where've you been?" Arnold didn't mean to sound irritated, but somehow their unison, their lack of fatigue had underlined his loneliness.

"We went to the village." Bill shifted his bundle. "We had to get some bird food. It was all out, and we'd forgotten—"

"I hope we got enough." Frances set down her package. "That ought to feed all the birds in the country."

"Well, we'll have to hurry or it'll be too dark." Bill was gruff. "You sprinkle the feed, and I'll fill the suet baskets. You see—" he did not look at his father, but his manner insisted that this trip was necessary—"Mother always filled them, and we helped when she didn't feel well. We almost forgot. They'll expect their breakfasts."

Arnold stood leaning on his stick, watching them as they moved along the terraces, among the trees. He had never noticed the little cedar boxes, the wire baskets. Candy came to stand beside him. "Noldy," she said, "don't be cross if we weren't here." Her voice was low. "Bill feels bad. He said there was a sparrow today, a new one, one Mother had been waiting for, and he said God was dreadful not to let her see it. He hollered. Noldy—" She pulled at Arnold's hand, her fingers suddenly frantic—"Why couldn't he let her see it?"

Arnold did not look at her. His eyes followed the stocky, intent figure of his son; the outline of the figure blurred, became two overlapping Bills, as if the hot ache behind his eye-balls destroyed focus. It was thus that a child knew death,

coming bolt upright against the fact in some small, gentle thing like this. A child? How else did anyone?

"You aren't crying, Noldy?" Candy leaned against his shoulder, sighing with relief as he looked down at her, his face quiet. "Frances said crying wasn't any use. She said it was more use to go to the village and get the bird-seed and take care of the birds, and so we went and then Bill got to feeling better."

"Frances is right. She's a sensible girl." Dear Lord, thought Arnold, I have to try to make it up to them, some way. I don't know how. The compassion which dilated his heart was a new, strange tenant; he was inept, awkward, unused to its presence. It was like a force reversing the habitual centripetal motion of his life, slowing it, coercing it to flow outward. All the things Candace did with them, he thought. They'll be constantly bumping against her absence. Take these birds. What do I know about them? Woman stuff, things she filled her days with.

"Candy!" yelled Bill. "Will you come hold this suet? Or catch hold of Dickens? He's eating it." The small terrier yelped with joy as Candy ran at him. This was a good game. And Candy ran with him through the trees, calling him, dodging, in her flight again dropping all unhappiness.

Arnold went into the house. He laid fresh logs on the fire, walked to each window, hearing the clink of rings as he drew the curtains. Someone had removed the withered chrysanthemums, but sheets of music littered the top of the piano. Well, a second girl would perhaps keep order. He sat down in his chair near the fireplace and unfolded the evening paper. But instead of reading he leaned back, eyes closed. If he could stop thinking for a minute! At a slight noise he lifted his head. Bill peered in at the doorway.

"I thought you were asleep." He came a tentative step into the room, head thrust forward from folds of his gray turtle-

neck sweater, hair on end, nose almost normal, hands red and suet-grubby. "Would it bother you very much if I asked you to do something? Frances thought it would, but you see I need it."

"What?" asked Arnold.

"It's a book, a diary we keep—kept. I expect it's in her room. It's quite a big book, a red one, with just sheets of paper inside. It always useta be on the shelf over the desk. I thought mebbe you'd look for it." His face was screwed into conquest of whatever feeling he had, reluctance to ask, perhaps, or more than reluctance to go beyond that closed door.

"Must you have it?" Arnold sat forward.

"I'm supposed to put the bird in. I might forget when it came."

"Oh, yes. Yes. I'll see if I can find it."

Arnold climbed the stairs at a steady gait. Mustn't let Bill think he minded opening that door. In a way it was a gesture from the boy, a question. How much will you help, he meant, and is it all right to go on with things that were hers? He turned the knob, pushed open the door, felt for the wall switch. Come, no sentimental lingering. Curiously the room had less emptiness than the rest of the house. Someone, the nurse perhaps, had set it beautifully to rights, behind the closed door the faintly aromatic odor of a scent Candace had used in drawers, in linen, had filled the air, as if the pale-yellow of the walls sent out spiciness; the silver toilet articles sparkled on the dressing table, the heavy white draperies hung in sweeping folds, the leaded panes of the apple-wood secretary glinted. Arnold crossed the soft, pale rug to the secretary, and opened the doors. Rows of books, and he was looking for a red one, quite big. Books she had read, lying there at the window. He found the red one, on its side on the lowest shelf.

Bill waited for him at the foot of the stairs, his solemn face

turned up. It lighted as he saw the diary, and with a mutter of thanks he started with it for the dining room.

"What are you going to put in it?" Arnold wanted to detain the boy, to capture some vague reward.

"Oh, just a bird," said Bill. "You wouldn't be interested."

"What about the bird?" Confound the boy! He needn't be so stand-offish.

"Just the date and name. Tree sparrow. A week later than he came last year." Bill spoke grudgingly, not looking at his father. The angle of his head was resistant. Arnold thought: he won't talk to me, he won't speak of Candace. Irritation put an edge of mockery on his next words.

"Birds don't come in the fall, do they? When I was young, they arrived in the spring. Got your dates mixed?"

"They come down from the north." (And you don't even know that! said his tone.) "Most of 'em go through much earlier, and the winter birds stop off here. The tree sparrows mostly go other places, but a few stay here." He was earnest, relieving his father's ignorance. "For four years we've had a few around."

"And you've kept that diary for four years?" Arnold couldn't have analyzed his darkening mood: a shadow of jealousy at intimacy denied to him, resentment at the implication of his ignorance, a resentment aggravated by the injustice in the boy's attitude, withdrawing sulkily when Arnold tried to set up communication. "What difference does it make what day a bird chirps at you?"

Bill hugged the book to his side; his ears grew red, but his glance at his father was steady and defiant. If Arnold thought he could shake an old allegiance, could command an unwon intimacy—"I couldn't explain it to you." He made a gulping sound and then stalked out of the hall, back held so straight the old gray sweater bagged between his shoulders.

Ought to go after him, make him apologize. Here Arnold



was, giving up everything for the children, coming home to stay with them, and then his son acted like that. Playing the loving father might not be pure idyll. What was it all about, anyway? His anger was dulled into bewilderment, and he walked heavily into the living room. Perhaps he had left them too much to Candace. He sat down and waited for a slowly materializing certainty to take shape. He didn't start at scratch with one of the three. Each of them had already a complete attitude toward him, a secret and substantial notion of what he was. Candace's death had altered his consciousness of them, but not theirs of him. Why should it give him a feeling of discomfort to reach this certainty about them? He wasn't so bad, as men go. Provided well for them, didn't he? They had everything. He wasn't ugly, didn't beat them up, seldom even yelled at them. A man didn't have to give up his few amusements, did he, just because he had a family? Look at the other men he knew! Well, Candy at least adored him. She hadn't reached the critical age. And when she did?

If Candace, his wife, had only gone on loving him, as she had at first— What, at the last, had she felt toward him? You're what a woman fears and hates most in a man. No. That was Doris. Damn it, that was all that ailed him, that outrageous attack from her. Enough to undermine one's self-confidence, coming at such a time. He'd got to stop this sitting around and brooding, imagining things. But still he sat, hands restless on the arms of the chair, a furrow between his heavy brows, his dark blue eyes strained as if sea-fog had risen all about him and he could not make out familiar shapes, could not discern how far along a road he had come nor even who he was who came there.

## 2.

More than once that first winter Arnold wavered at the verge of a decision to pack the children off to schools and

close the house. Then the next morning he would think: I have that always as a last resort; I'll try it a while longer. Lena was too distractedly busy with a series of illnesses in her own family to offer any assistance. By the time that Charles was convalescing from a long struggle with flu and threatened pneumonia, Lena had relapsed into her usual habit of no particular concern about her brother's affairs. Probably just as well, thought Arnold. If Lena had been free, she might have been too helpful. Hulda had a succession of maids from agencies who came, scrapped, and departed. One drank, one tried to sneak her young man upstairs, echoes of the warfare were loud in the house. But finally Hulda found a young English girl who had been in this country so short a time she seemed as yet to have no vices and no ideas about her own rights as opposed to Hulda's. Doris made several attempts in letters to reinstate herself, until Arnold returned two letters unopened. The following week Frances handed her father an envelope.

"Auntie Dee asked me to give you this." Her forehead had a puzzled crease. "I don't see why she never comes out any more. I wrote and told her we wanted to see her. All she said was she'd been very busy, and please give you this. I shouldn't think she'd be that busy."

Anger beat in Arnold's temples. Doris had tricked him into opening another letter. He withdrew a pace from Frances, whose eager eyes waited for the unfolding of the sheet.

The children have begged me to see them. Must you carry your revenge so far it hurts them, too?

His hand crunched the paper. He was tempted for a moment to obliterate her, saying to Frances, "She doesn't wish to be bothered with you. She has no time for you." Wouldn't that end it, easily? But already he had found once or twice that a mild misstatement served as a boomerang when tossed

at one of these children of his. They had an uncanny way of checking him up, of being amazed at anything less than truth.

"It's rather hard to explain." Arnold's voice was confidential, he gave Frances a slow, deprecating smile. "Puts me in a bad light. You see, your aunt doesn't approve of me. She told me so at great length, with violence. Naturally, I talked back. Frankly, I don't care for her. And so she can't very well come to my house."

"But if you had a quarrel, can't you make it up?" Frances was earnest, helpful. "We miss her lots. She's—she's awfully nice."

"It wasn't just a quarrel. There are some things which can not be unsaid. I don't want her in my house. I don't like to say more, because she is your mother's sister. We can get along without her."

"But, Father, I like her. Next best outside our family I like her." A tremor showed in her full eyelids, her short upper lip, a vibration of resistance to his air of confidence, his smile. "I need her to talk to!"

"We won't argue about it!" Arnold's patience snapped. "You might show some loyalty to me instead of prating about how much you like her after what I've told you!" Frances flinched, color burning suddenly in her face. "I won't have her influence on you. She's done harm enough already. I want my daughter to grow into real womanhood. What she'd try to turn you into, God knows! Is it much to ask, in the light of all I am doing for you, that you accept my judgment about this, and stop pulling a mournful face over it?" He had said more than he meant to, and said it more violently, and Frances, instead of trying to placate him, to please him, had lifted her head, a queer prescient stubbornness in her flushed face. "Is it?" he insisted. "Don't stand there and sulk!"

"I can't change the way I feel." Her voice fluttered, and she backed toward the door.

Arnold strode after her, laid a hand on her shoulder, saw tears under her lowered lids. "You do as I say, and your feelings will take care of themselves. That's my good girl." His voice warmed, gracious and disarming, he smiled at her. "Why, you're my righthand man. We have to see eye to eye about things." Her shoulder relaxed under his fingers, she nodded, managed a quick smile, and then with unexpected dignity walked out of the room. Arnold frowned, reflecting that something had eluded him in this victory. He had first intimidated and then propitiated the child, but both the fear and the capitulation had been partial. She was growing up too fast, fed on too much responsibility, perhaps. Was she going to be wilful, hard to handle? Oh, not Frances. He'd hurt her feelings, flying into a temper. She wanted to be treated as an equal. Well, he was learning to keep his temper about most things, and now this last attempt of Doris had been scotched, there surely was an end to her. He watched Frances for a day or so, and then forgot that matter in the details of the approaching motor show.

For the first time he was to have a booth, and in the excitement of preparation, the encounters with men from western automobile factories, his ideas about the future of his own small plant expanded feverishly. The world became a place to encircle with good roads, on which to drive miracles of perfected machinery. And most of the cars would, finally, why not, have instrument boards that shone with his products. He took the children in the Sunday before the opening, a high spot in a difficult holiday season. Bill, he thought, should have shown more interest. Any boy would get a kick out of engines cut down to show pistons and cylinders, shining nickel chassis, booths of new gadgets. But Bill shied away diffidently from hearty inquiries, "Well, what do you think of this, my boy?"

and finally lodged at a refreshment counter, to watch the installation of a hot dog roaster. Arnold wandered on with the two girls. It was, he thought, the first time he had taken them into—you couldn't call it society, but whatever it was—and he watched with growing amusement the behavior of each of them. Frances, neat and decorous in dark blue coat and hat, walked beside him, making proper little phrases about things he pointed out, replying politely when one of his acquaintances stopped for a moment. Candace, her small face suffused in a radiance of complete excitement, whirled from one thing to another, glowed visibly when someone asked her how she liked it, was so gay and quick in response that acquaintances of Arnold's lingered to banter with her, in a light travesty of coquetry. Beside her Frances seemed heavy, self-conscious. Too bad she had none of Candy's animation, her charm.

"If you were a few years older—" Brewer, a Detroit man, with shrewd small eyes in a square ruddy face, topped by a stiff brush of hair, looked at Arnold—"I'd walk off with you right under your Dad's nose. You're just the girl I'm looking for to help celebrate. Let's make a date for a coupla years from now, eh? Tell you what, Carlton, you'll have to look out for her. I won't be the only fellow dating her up."

"She's my girl now." Arnold grinned at the way Candy rolled up her long lashes.

"See you later, Carlton. You know our headquarters? Room 610. Got some Canadian brew, real stuff, worth sampling."

Arnold watched the brushy bullet head hurtling down the aisle—Brewer always started off in third gear. Well, he was important, one of the head men in that big new plant. He could turn a lot of business Arnold's way if he chose. Last year they'd just started, and it seemed a toss-up as to whether a new car in the low-price range would have a chance. They'd played in luck, and this year, with a new model—Arnold pinched a fold of skin between thumb and forefinger and

rubbed it over his jaw. Brewer wanted another party. Last year— What a night that was!

"Wasn't he a nice man, Noldy!" Candy nudged at his elbow. (See, I'm here, said her poke.)

"I think he was silly," said Frances, "talking that way to a little girl."

"He was just trying to be pleasant." Frances's tone stung him. Just when he was gripped by hunger for a freedom he had lost because of her, she turned on a friend with that sanctimonious air! "If you'd make a little effort yourself when we meet friends of mine instead of being critical!"

Frances lifted her head sharply, chin out, her usual gesture to keep feeling from spilling over; her face flushed; she glanced around, and her voice was a hurried whisper, trying to keep this rebuke secret. "I'm sorry, Father. I didn't mean to be critical. I do try to say things." Then, desperately, "I can't flirt with them! It makes me embarrassed."

Arnold glanced at Candy, poised, alert to catch a clue to his next step. Suddenly his mood veered, into wry amusement. He laughed, and tucked a hand under Frances's arm. "You'll have to learn, my girl." He laughed again. "Candy can give you lessons." That was the trouble with Frances. She was old enough to detect that flavor of the prowling male which tinged the air at conventions, at meetings, at motor shows, at anything when men put space between them and their routine lives, when for a brief time they felt it safe to slough off decorum and discipline. And what he had resented in her comment was that it epitomized the deterrence in women—good women. "You can't be serious always," he said. (But she would!) "Come along, let's see what else we can find. We're out for some fun." Candy skipped a little, clinging to his other arm, thistledown in the breeze which whisked off the moment of unpleasantness. Frances, he thought, had certain qualities which Candace had possessed. She'd make some man

a good wife, and probably keep him toeing the mark. Not that he could have ever summed up Candace in those phrases. She had never lifted a finger to hold him on any mark she drew. If she had cared a little more— Funny how a woman couldn't realize that after days like this and the rest of the week, a man rated a little diversion. The very air of the building, the walls, the shining metal gave off vibrations as tangible as those of light or sound, vibrations of this male mood, composite of fierce rivalry, of absorption in details of making, exhibiting, selling this most important product of the age; of the urge to make more, sell more, climb steadily into the top layers of more money, more success, more terrific competition.

All of a man's life was like that, the daily round perhaps less concentrated, less intense. What wonder that later in the week, when the show closed, celebration was in order? What harm would it do this year if he stepped out with Brewer? Stay in town for the night. The children would be all right for one night, with two maids in the house.

"Let's go back to the main floor, Noldy, and pick out the car we like best." Candy wound her fingers into his, pulling gently.

Arnold looked down at her; what they didn't know couldn't hurt them. Then a quick, ironic notion compressed all his thoughts, tying a string around them, handing him the lot. "This, my fine fellow, is what is called temptation, and you don't recognize it because you've always yielded. Can't be tempted until you resist."

"Shall we, Noldy? It's much more fun than this floor."

"All right." As Arnold stepped forward toward the wide dark doors, he halted. "I'll tell you." He spoke abruptly. "You go find Bill, and stay with him till I come. I've got to see some people. Business. Run along." His manner silenced Candy's murmur of protest, and Arnold watched them down the aisle, out of sight behind the center booths, before he

turned again. Isabelle had seen him, for all she pretended to lean with such absorption toward the man who talked with her, a portly, offensively prosperous fellow with his fur-collared overcoat, his velour hat. It was the motor car agent who had introduced Arnold, that first night in the speak-easy! She swore she'd never been out with him before, that she never had seen him again, and here she was—What's it to you? Arnold thrust a hard fist into his pocket and stared at her. She was in evening dress, the slender arm which drew together folds of the long coat gleaming white against the vivid green of the velvet, the curls of her dark hair caught under a silver band; she tipped her head—that old trick—to give her handsome, provocative eyes full play; her mouth was scarlet. She turned, a slow twist of her long graceful back, and gave an admirable start of surprise, a gay wave of a hand upon which a square dinner ring flashed. His ring. She spoke to her companion, her fingers running over the edge of his collar persuasively, and with a shrug he left her. Arnold watched her come slowly toward him, letting her cloak fall open to show the silver sheath of gown, snug over rounded breasts and thighs, the opaque cream smoothness of her skin. She had a good shape, no mistaking it, and she knew it. Furthermore, she'd come to show it to him. Knew he'd be here. Last year she'd come with him!

"Hello, darling!" She stood close to him, scent from her hair strong in his nostrils. "Fancy seeing you here! Aren't the cars marvelous! I left my vanity case in one of them, and Dickie's gone for it." A brittle note in her laughter—"Arnold, you bad boy, when are you coming to see poor lonely me?"

Arnold thought: Candy's somewhere behind us, watching this. I'm sure of it, I can feel her. Isabelle was too close to him, too intimate, he couldn't escape by running, she'd follow him, she didn't care what sort of scene she made—her nose had



white dents at the nostrils, sign of trouble. "Let's step out here in the hall. No one there."

"Were those your girls?"

Arnold did not answer. As he pushed open the heavy swinging door, and Isabelle swept past him, he felt the scarcely restrained passion which mounted in her, anger, hatred that he could reject her, passion itself. The corridor was dimly lighted, wide worn stairs cut angles upwards, downwards, there was a chill, dank smell of plaster, of old wood, of old tobacco, of old crowds. Then Isabelle flung herself against him, arms about his neck, mouth hard on his.

Arnold, with agile upward thrust of his hands, broke open the clinging arms, held her away from him. "This is a public hall," he said. "Anyone's likely to come along."

"I've known you not to be so cautious."

"At the beginning of an affair—"

"You mean—this is the end?"

"It feels like it." It did. The old attraction was utterly depolarized, at least at his end. He was as unmoved as if he were already deep in a new affair. Self-preservation, perhaps, stronger than sex.

"I've waited weeks, not going anywhere, in case you were lonely and wanted me. What has happened, Arnold? You are free now. You couldn't have cared so much—"

"You ought to see it wouldn't look right, tearing around places now."

"You could come to the apartment. I don't have to be taken around."

Arnold was silent, listening for feet on the dark stairs, wondering whether the door behind them had swung open a crack. It would be like Candy to come looking for him. "I'll have to go along, Isabelle. I've got my children here."

"I saw them." Isabelle looked at him. Under the dirty single light, far overhead, her face was gaunt, the bony structure

hinted under the skin, the painted mouth sullen. "I saw you hurry them away. You're afraid of me, aren't you? Afraid now that you no longer have a wife to deceive, that I might compromise you, try to catch you. You don't want those girls to see me. I'm not good enough for them. But you are, no matter what you do, of course. You're a man." She wound her cloak about her, shivering into the green folds. "It's chilly. I'll tell you one thing, Arnold, I wouldn't marry you for a good deal. Thank God I don't need a man to support me. I've got my own good job. I had enough of marriage, while men are like you, smug and conventional and thinking of appearances and going their own sly way. I've been crazy about you, but my little heart won't break."

"I'm sure of that." Arnold was frigid, courteous, hiding his anger. She was trying to turn the tables, to save her face by attacking him, she would enjoy it if he flew into a rage, liking any kind of scene with strong emotion better than this cold exchange. "There's always Dickie."

He saw the flash in her eyes: was he jealous? Then she shrugged. "Dickie and others." They both heard feet ascending the stairs, plunk, plunk, feet of someone who thought himself alone, unwatched. "Well, we had a grand time while it lasted." Isabelle ran a hand over her hair, shoving, patting. "All I hope is that when those girls of yours grow up, they show you a thing or two you don't know about women nowadays."

Arnold pushed at the door, just as a head swam up into sight in the stairwell, stiff hair, ruddy face of Brewer. "Ah, Carlton!" (Sly dog, said his tone.) "Been looking for you. How about dropping in at the hotel tonight?" Up mounted the head, until Brewer stood in the hall. Isabelle gave a little settling shake of body within garments, and held out a receptive hand. "Why, if it isn't Mrs.—no, let me think!—" Brewer held the hand, his eyes appraising Isabelle, squinting at Ar-

nold. "Last year, at the show, and then at that roof garden. Mrs.—Mrs.—Wilson!"

"What a memory!" All gauntness, sullenness had gone from her face; she flashed her lashes, her eyes were luminous, indefinitely she suggested to Brewer that although he had found her talking with Arnold, the latter meant nothing in her life. "A whole year!"

"How about bringing Mrs. Wilson and dropping in, Carlton?" Brewer dug a thumb into a vest pocket, flipping at a charm-weighted watch chain. "Several of the boys are there. Maybe you could suggest something for the balance of the evening? Not too wild. Tomorrow's a hard day."

"Sorry," said Arnold. "I can't do it. If Mrs. Wilson, on the other hand—" Smoke from smouldering irritation choked him, smarted his eyes. He couldn't antagonize Brewer. If Isabelle went off with him—

"Can't take a lovely lady away from you, Carlton."

"Mrs. Wilson isn't with me. We've been just waiting for Dickie to find a lost vanity case."

"Well, come along too, old man!" Brewer wrinkled his nose and nodded. (Think you're fooling me? You been up to something, you two.) "And Dickie, too."

"Arnold is very domestic these days," said Isabelle. For a moment the expression on her full mouth, lips parted to show strong teeth, was feral. Then she turned gaily to Brewer. "But I'm not! Let's go!"

"I forgot you had some kids with you." Brewer wrinkled his nose again. "Leave 'em home later this week, eh, Carlton?"

Arnold flung open the door, and the three entered the floor, Isabelle playing the rôle of woman surrounded by adoring males, down to the last finger tip of graceful hand. Dickie, puffing his cheeks, tapping a foot, lost part of his air of injury in the brilliance of the appearance, the doubling of attendants. Arnold left them, with a jaunty wave at Brewer.

Back through the almost empty aisles he walked, past a plump man who arched a rotund rear, trousers tight, and puffed as he unpacked the last of piles of gaudy advertising circulars. At the corner booth two men ambitiously tried to loop skid chains like festoons, cursing as the weight tore staples out of flimsy wall-board partitions. "Get some rope, get some nails, what the hell!" They did not look up as Arnold passed. Around the corner he saw the children, standing in a solemn group, resolute to hide the fact that if only momentarily, they were abandoned. They moved at sight of him, in a little wave of relief.

"Candy said you'd gone off with a lady." Bill scowled. "We didn't know what to do next."

(Who was that lady I saw you with? That was no lady, that was my wife. Grotesquely the old vaudeville joke rang in his ears.) "Can't you amuse yourselves a minute?" Arnold checked himself: no fair, taking it out on them, if they did seem holding him to account. He'd brought them along to give them a good time, hadn't he? "Let's walk down the front stairs. We get the best view of the cars that way, and Candy can select the one she likes best."

They had time, before the train left, for hot cocoa and sandwiches at the station restaurant. The children deliberated over the list of sandwich possibilities until Arnold warned them the train would go without them if they didn't hurry. "Try a Club, that's a good bet," he suggested. Bill chose ham an' egg, objecting that he didn't know what a Club was. Candy wanted Club because it cost the most of any. (Isabelle should see me now, thought Arnold. Room 610, Canadian brew. Thick tumblers on a tray on the dresser, ice in a pitcher, too many people, shrill bursts of laughter.) And Bill, gazing at the pickle-topped edifice in front of Candy with regret sombre on his chunky face. "Have one too, Bill?" Bill could. They had to race across the lower level to the gate. Frances

and Bill sat just ahead of Arnold and Candy. As far as Yonkers Candy leaned over the back of their seat, head between theirs, watching Bill display the collection with which he had filled every pocket, samples of links, of polish, cards, pamphlets—when and where he had assembled them Arnold didn't know. Then Candy subsided against Arnold's shoulder, sleepy as a kitten. Arnold eased his body gently and felt her soft collapse into sleep.

He stared out of the window, where swift reflections of unseen lights ran past on the surface of the river, where darkness shaped itself into small buildings, trees, massed rocks, all moving quickly away. If he leaned forward a trifle he saw his own reflection, a transparency through which lights or darkness moved. At a station where the train stopped, the lanterns of men along the platform moved in a dance of tiny white particles, and he wondered whether snow was falling. Bill looked out of the window, too, turning at times to speak to Frances, but their words were too low for him to catch. Gradually the soft pressure of the child's body against his drew all his attention, and he looked down, seeing her profile. She had pulled off her hat, and her dark hair was ruffled into feathers along his sleeve. Her lashes curled into a dark crescent, the full lower lip thrust forward. He heard Brewer: "You'll have to watch out for her, Carlton. I won't be the only fellow—" and suddenly a bitter jealousy of the future for her curled in his veins. He didn't want her growing up! He had been proud of her, he had been amused by her, but this was a new emotion, this strange, not to be located ache, as if helpless, relaxed in sleep, she rested against him for security, and for the first time a fear of his own inadequacy came seeping through the smooth surface of the self he recognized as his. Candace shouldn't have died, leaving him such a task! She would have known just how she wished them to grow; she had no doubts in her beliefs, in her code of morals and manners; she had no

inconsistencies in her own actions. Was that the essential quality, that consistency, that integrity? It was easy for a woman. Motherhood for her was a thing of flesh as well as spirit, mind, emotion; it was a channel through which sex ran clearly to its goal, and passion was transmuted into tenderness. Fatherhood worked no such alchemy for a man. There was so little of the flesh in fatherhood, and what there was so transient, so remote in time, that even a man's belief in his own fatherhood depended upon the woman. These thoughts moved in Arnold not in words, but in troubled groping among unexplored impulses, among half forgotten, unrealized impressions of Candace. She had expected him to be changed, when it was she who had the baby. Fatherhood wasn't a physical experience, it was—well, nothing but an idea. A man kept it quite separate from the part of him that went foraging for pleasure, for satisfaction of desire. He was embarrassed if in any way the two parts impinged upon each other. He was inconsistent, being a dozen different selves. What he did, what he wished his children to do, what he believed or doubted, what he thought they should believe, the front he paraded for them to see. "I'm no worse than other men!" he cried out to himself, in a sudden fury at this undermining of his pride. "Look at Brewer! Look at all of them!" His body jerked with the violence of his rejection, and Candy stirred, lifted her head.

"Are we there yet?" She yawned, and Frances turned.

"It's the next stop," she said. "You better get your hat on."

Frances has a touch of it already, thought Arnold, as the four of them filed to the vestibule of the car. Pre-maternal. Candy hasn't it. Lord, she's only a baby. Then, in the moment while he stepped to the platform, "That's what ails Isabelle. Hard as a man. Passion. No love. Too many modern females try to be that way. Destroy the world. Glad I'm done with her."

It was snowing, soft, aimless flakes which did not cling to

the windshield, which moved in a slow spiral dance in the bath of the headlights, as Arnold drove slowly home. The irregular blades of winter grass pricked through the thin layer on the lawn, the evergreens were lightly frosted.

"Aw, Gee, wouldn't it snow just when we gotta go back to school tomorrow!" Bill kicked ruefully at the shiny red bob-sled which stood in a corner of the garage.

"We'll take the sled to school." Candy slid out of the car. "You can pull me!"

"Here, give me a hand with these doors." Arnold pulled one shut, and waited for Bill to drag the other into place.

The house had the chilliness of a furnace properly closed for the night. Arnold went directly to his room. When the children were quiet, he opened his door and, hand moving along the wall, walked carefully in the dark to the door that had been Candace's. Noiselessly he turned the knob, and then closed the door behind him. Weeks since he had been in here. "What should I do about her room?" Hulda had asked. "Should I do it when I do the upstairs?" "Keep it clean and leave it alone," Arnold had ordered. Tonight it breathed a new odor, tangy-sweet in the darkness, stronger than the lingering scent he had expected. It angered him, suggesting intrusion, and he made a quick movement to find the wall-switch. He saw it at once, too bright a note in the pale, clear room, a bowl of apples on the window shelf above the radiator, a little pile of brownish cores beside it, and on the chaise longue a red book. A shout for Bill formed in his throat: how dared he come in here, leaving a mess about? Sitting there at Candace's window, munching apples—Arnold crossed the room, his slippers noiseless on the rug. The book was that diary, bulging over a pencil thrust in its pages. The scent of apples rose like a persuasive voice. See, a boy has been here, a boy not very old. Why had he come here? He has not spoken once of Candace, thought Arnold, and yet he comes

here. He stopped, opening the book at the pencil. At the top of the page an entry in Candace's fine script:

We walked through the woods today, after the snow, looking for footprints. Frances found deer marks, with a patch of ground dug bare for nibbling at dry grass. Candy found a cottontail trail, flying triangles in both directions, as if they had run back and forth all night. Bill found bird marks, tail and outspread wings, clear as a fossil print, and all the children had to make angels in the snow like the bird.

Under it, Bill's pencilled scrawl, held down to smaller size than usual.

We went on the same walk today but it hadn't snowed and we didn't see much besides some junco but I think the dogwood buds are swelled up more.

He had written bugs, and scratched a *d* over the *g*.

Arnold closed the book over the pencil, and straightened his body. A year ago, after their walk, they must have trooped up here to watch Candace set down the record. This year Bill must have sat here for a long time, three apples-long, doing what, thinking what? Why, Bill was no intruder here. He, Arnold, belonged here far less than the boy. The undefined impulse which had propelled him thus far tonight had lost its force, and he hesitated, looking about the room. What had he thought to find? Might it be better to walk out, to lock the door, to send the boy off to school where he would forget, to pack off the girls, to put an end to this unaccustomed torment?

He drew back the chair in front of the tall secretary and sat down. Dust on the fine-grained apricot-hued lid of the desk. He drew the sleeve of his dressing gown over it, and then lowered the lid. *If I could talk to her*, he thought, *if I could ask her*—and suddenly, for the first time since her death, he was weighted down under the cold stone of longing, sealed, fixed, held immobile under futile longing. If he could find



some trace of what she thought, or felt, or planned, perhaps, for the children, or where she had drawn that integrity of hers. His fingers were hasty, rifling pigeonholes, opening drawers, searching. The desk was curiously empty. Candace never hoarded, and more than that, she must have kept her house in order because she knew she would leave it. Little piles of her own letter paper, a book of stamps, an address book, a memorandum pad with a list of groceries (for Hulda: she always told me what to do next). Fine brass of desk fittings. Empty, unrevealing. At last he stood up, closing the lid. Too late to look for Candace now. And if she were still alive he wouldn't be wallowing in this morass of uncharacteristic thought. He wouldn't be looking for her, any more than he had done for years. If she had lifted a finger to hold him, had made the slightest gesture. Her very indifference had sped him faster on his separate way.

He walked across to the dressing table, looking down at silver and crystal. Night after night she must have sat here, brushing out her fine light hair with that rhythmic flexing of wrist. Last year she had had her hair cut shoulder length, because it tangled so the days she spent in bed. Strange that the mirror, which had held a thousand images of her, should give back nothing but his own dark-browed, harassed face. What had she thought, as she sat there? Why hadn't she said at some time, "Arnold, I want to talk about the children."

The apple-smell crept again to his attention, like an answer. He thought, the boy prefers this empty room to me. He is at ease here, natural, chewing apples, scrawling his notes; Candace gave him so much that it lasts over. That's what she meant to do. For all three of them. "She thought I wasn't worth talking to!" The words hung in the air after he had spoken them, and the palms of his hands, his temples were damp. It was hard, this fumbling after knowledge of another, a woman, a stranger. Why, the children knew more of her

than he did! It was hard, too like crawling out of one's own skin, too like packing one's bones and body into a shape they did not, could not fit! But it was true. He had thought her too exigent, too idealistic, too rarefied for comfort, and had run his own ways glibly, swiftly, so that no shadow of any truth might fall across his path. And she had given her gifts to the children. She must have dreaded leaving them. That was what she had meant when she said, "Must I die?" She must have toiled to fortify them with her courage, her loyalty, her pride, her humor, so that her death would matter less to them. She had thought that was all she could do, that there was nothing she could ask of him. Perhaps she had told her sister to take little Candace. He had already suggested school for Bill, saying he was too much with girls and women. She had known precisely what his own first plan would be. What she hadn't known was that the children themselves would refuse to give up what she had made for them, and that refusing, they would oust him from his comfortable daily round into an hour like this.

"It's funny, isn't it?" Arnold addressed the tranquil room, his face contorted. "Good joke! Too bad you can't watch it!" He snapped off the light, let himself out, thief-still, and plodded to his own room.

He was late the next morning, after a restless night, and the children had already started for school. Outside the windows clouds of snow, fine and brilliant, blew past, as if the whirling of the earth would never let it settle. No cream, no morning paper. The snow-plows had not yet come through. "Leonardo says not a car could get through, it's drifted so bad." Hulda made round eyes over the drama, as she brought hot milk for the coffee. "Whatever will you do, Mr. Carlton?"

"Walk, if I can't ride." Arnold scowled at the pale mixture in his cup. Slop, that was what it was. Slop! "Why can't you

keep cream on hand?" And then, "Why'd you let the children start off, if the roads are that bad?"

"Let 'em?" Hulda puffed indignantly. "They were crazy-wild to be off. It was all I could do to get them into proper leggings. Bunch of banshees."

The mile tramp to the station improved Arnold's circulation more than his disposition. A man less determined than he would have stayed at home, he thought, stamping off snow in the waiting room. Frost on his collar melted, steaming up wet wool smell, sweat tickled his ribs. Fine way to catch cold. Fine place to live, the country. If the storm continued, it would ruin the motor show. He made a gruff response to an overture about weather from a young fellow in an old army overcoat and puttees. Then the train roared and hissed in, with billows of snow turned up by the great brushes attached to the engine.

A gang of men worked clearing the loading yard at the factory, their shovels raucous on the cement under the snow. Bad job getting those shipments down to the tracks today. Then they'd be held up all across the country, with orders cancelled because dates weren't met. Arnold carried his ill temper into the office. Walsh, the advertising and promotion manager, was in town for the day, in charge of the exhibit. Why the devil had he let Walsh have all the fun? Better than sticking here, if he'd gone himself. He needed some relaxation, that was the trouble with him. Bugged down in routine, in the domestic scene, until every nerve in his body was askew. Why not go in later? Call up the house, explain that he'd had such a bad time getting through this morning he wouldn't try to get home for the night. Get away from the headache in such morbid thoughts as last night's. Within him something licked lean chops and grinned.

At four he asked Miss Nichols to telephone home for him, and shut himself into the small lavatory. From a metal filing case in a corner he pulled out a clean shirt, tearing off the

paper laundry band. Have to bring down some more. Hadn't changed here for so long he'd forgotten to check his supply. He changed cuff links, buttoned the shirt, slapped the tails down over hard, flat thighs, stared at himself knotting a blue tie. He looked better already. He-male evening, no skirts, ending in that new Turkish bath.

"Get them?" He strolled out, giving a final scrutiny to flat nails, with straight white rims, that tipped long, pronated fingers.

"The line seems to be busy, Mr. Carlton." Miss Nichols sounded flustered. "I've tried several times." (One more thing gone wrong, at the end of a trying day!)

"Well, try again. There's no one there who'd talk forever." Arnold pulled on his overcoat, diving with one hand to settle his suit coat. He blew a grain of dust from hatbrim. The snow hadn't marked it. Too cold. "Ask operator to get them." He stood at the door, glancing at the wall clock. Just about time to make that train. They'd be on schedule by this time of day. "I'll have to go. Just be sure you get them before you leave."

He was halfway across the yard, the wind stinging his face in its first assault, when he heard her cry after him. She ran toward him, wrapping her arms around her breast as the wind struck her, her spectacles misting in the sudden chill. "I don't know—I'm afraid something may be wrong—Operator says they aren't connected."

"Get back out of this cold!" Arnold took her elbow and bundled her up the steps. "You idiot! I don't want to lose a good secretary." He banged the door, still gay. "Now what's wrong? Why can't you get them if they aren't connected?"

"She thinks someone has left the 'phone off the hook."

"Lord, wouldn't they, just when I want to get them! Now what?" He frowned at the clock as the long arrow jerked

along toward train time. "Get the office in the village. Ask Mrs. Purdy there if she'll send a boy up with a message."

He waited, braced against the muscle-impulsion to be off. "No, I want to speak to Mrs. Purdy. Mr. Carlton's secretary calling." Miss Nichols was intense, needing to solve this snarl quickly for him. "Mrs. Purdy? Mr. Carlton can't get his house. Could you send a message— What? What's that?" Her eyes rolled up to Arnold's face, the thick lenses magnifying horror, and she held the ear-piece closer, incredulous. "Here!" She thrust it at Arnold. "They're calling you now. Oh, Mr. Carlton!"

"Father! Father!" It was Frances, in a voice so small, so remote, that it seemed to come from under all the snow that whirled between them. "Oh, come, quick!" He could see her thrust her chin out, in that struggle for control. "They've been hurt, coasting. Oh, can you come, quick?"

"Frances! Listen to me! How badly?" He held the telephone hard to his chest, afraid that Frances might drop off into the distance from which she cried. "Who's there? Have you sent for a doctor?"

"Yes," she said, and, "I don't know. The men are here... they brought them home. The doctor's coming. Oh, hurry! Candy's crying for me." She must have fumbled replacing the instrument; squawks at his ear, and then silence.

"Mrs. Purdy said she'd just located the doctor for them. That's how she happened to know. I hope it isn't serious!" Miss Nichols got to her feet, eager for service.

"I don't know. A coasting accident. Frances sounded frightened. But if Candy could call her—"

"Of course, then she can't be badly hurt! Oh, Mr. Carlton, after all the trouble you've had— Oh, I think it's too bad."

"The question is how to get out there." More than an hour before the first of the commuters' evening trains ran.

"There's Andy, with the light truck." Miss Nichols ran to

the window to look down into the yard. "He's in for his final load. He's a smart driver."

Andy thought sure he could get through. The Post Road was clear, he'd take a shovel, wouldn't Mr. Carlton be pretty cold on that front seat? They crawled through the town, caught behind a trolley, the sides of the road blocked with stalled cars grotesquely buried in snow thrown up by plows. Out of the village Andy drove faster, the chains whanging. Twice they dug themselves out of fresh drifts, more than once only some extraordinary swift dexterity of Andy's kept them to the road. It was dark when they reached the stone entrance pillars. Just within a car blocked the way, a second beyond it.

"'Fraid I can't get by, Mr. Carlton." Andy jumped down, ran ahead in snow to his knees. Arnold dislodged his stiff body from the seat. Hard work, driving every inch by proxy.

"Come up to the house. Get warm before you start back. Might be something you could do." He plunged up the road, the cold aching in his chest. He hadn't, until now, had to think about what he might find. Again, as on that other night, lights blazed from windows across the whiteness all about the house. He couldn't run; the snow was like fear, clogging his steps.

A strange man in the front hall, a shabby little fellow with a sharp, worried face. "I want to tell you it wasn't my fault," he began, as Arnold closed the door. "Nobody coulda helped it. Slid right under me, like that!" He struck his hands together. "Jeese, I never hit nobody before. They ain't got a right to go sliding on a highway. Hitting two kids like that. I want to tell you—" His face twisted, eyes tight shut—"Makes me sick at my stummick, can't get it out of my head."

"Where—" Arnold heard steps, voices, upstairs, and hurled himself upward, leaving the stranger going on with his refrain. Down the hall marched Hulda, bearing a basin piled

with bloodstained cloths. "Awk!" she screamed in a whisper, seeing Arnold, and jerked an elbow toward the room she had left.

Beside the bed, leaning forward, sat Dr. Welch, coatless, shirtsleeves puffed above his arm garters, and on the bed, too still, too white, Bill, one trussed arm outside the white cover. Dr. Welch nodded at Arnold, leaned a moment closer to the boy, and then got to his feet, stretching his shoulders.

"He's coming around all right." He joined Arnold at the door, his lean, noncommittal face quiet. "Don't look like that, Carlton." He manœvered him outside the room. "Bit of a concussion, fractured arm, that's all. His pulse is strong now, he'll wake up presently. Your daughter's been asking for you. Take off your coat, take it easy. She got a little cut, that's all. Missed her eye, had to have a few stitches. Spunky kid."

Strong odor of antiseptic met him at the threshold. Frances lifted her face, an eager rush to meet him in her eyes. Candy's face looked small, pinched, under the coil of bandage, and her eyes were frightened. "Noldy!" she cried, and Dr. Welch said, "Now you lie still or you'll get a headache." Arnold kissed her trembling chin. "Noldy, *is* Bill dead?"

"Of course not." Frances spoke earnestly, and the words were an echo of repeated assurance. "Candy, Bill's all right."

"He doesn't come in to see me. He must be awful hurt. I grabbed him so he couldn't steer. I want to see my Bill."

"As soon as he wakes up, you can see him, Candy." Dr. Welch pointed a finger at her. "I promise you that. Now behave yourself!"

"Will you stay with me, Noldy? I feel scared."

"I've given her a sedative," said Dr. Welch, in Arnold's ear. "Good deal of shock. She'll drop off presently." And to Frances, "Get your father some hot coffee, that's the girl. He's frozen, however he got here."

Arnold sat down by Candy's bed, her fingers hot and tight

in his hand. Part of him followed the quiet movement of the doctor, into the next room. His son, his daughter. His. Aloud, he said, "That's an interesting headdress. Makes you look like a little nun. Suppose you shut your eyes and see if you can't sleep a wink." And deep within, by his torment, he knew them as his own flesh.

Much later Arnold waited in the living room while Dr. Welch put through several telephone calls. To his wife: he couldn't get home for dinner. To the hospital: he'd be a little late. To his office: were there any messages? Bill had roused into a sluggish, indifferent consciousness, and then fallen asleep, the frightening rigor of his face altering subtly as self resumed its tenancy. Candy slept, too, with Frances sitting near in case remembered fear woke the child. Andy had driven to the village for a nurse, at present being served her dinner by a glum Hulda who did not intend to be put upon by any stuck-up piece in a uniform. Then Andy had moved the Doctor's car, and helped the shabby little man get his car started and backed out to the highway. When Arnold and the doctor had come down stairs, the fellow had jumped up, his face working, his voice hoarse. "Are they hurt bad? I wanta tell you it wasn't my fault. Slid right under me. Are they hurt bad?" Dr. Welch was kind to him. As far as he could tell, they'd be all right.

"I got some of my own." He shivered inside the threadbare coat. "I—I better be going, the wife'll be crazy." He left his name and address on a torn scrap of envelope.

When Andy came in, stamping off snow, from launching him homeward, he said, "He's scared crosseyed. How he's going to drive home! He don't own the car, hasn't got a cent, thinks you'll have him arrested."

"It wasn't his fault, I judge." Dr. Welch looked up, telephone hooked between ear and shoulder, waiting for the hospital call. "Frances says it was that long hill just below here,



with the curve at the foot. They'd been trying to slide here in the yard, and the snow was too deep. Frances was on her way home from school. There's a girl with guts! Had 'em brought in here. Couple of men from a coal truck that came along helped. Hello? Welch speaking."

"Well," said Andy, "he couldn'ta been going fast, not with that buggy."

Nothing more for Andy to do; "Aw, that's okey." He cut into Arnold's thanks. "If you think of anything else, you can call me next door." He wrote down the number. "They don't mind, no matter what time it is." Gruffly he hoped the kids would be all right, and was off.

Arnold paced the length of the room. Ten long steps. Fifteen if he made them shorter. Back again. Confound it, Welch was pretty casual, going off and leaving him here, snowbound, helpless. How did he know Bill was coming around as he should? A crack on the head— Candace had trusted Welch. He hadn't saved her, had he? So what did that prove? Arnold didn't really know the fellow well. He had always paid his bills promptly, seen little of him, resented vaguely a certain bland and sardonic speculation in the cool eyes, the firm, non-revealing mouth. His manner came too near saying: You think you're a fine buck-o, but I know a thing or two. Perhaps that was his way of looking at everyone.

The nurse had come into the hall, and the two of them were talking, in maddening professional undertones, things he wasn't to hear. The children were his, weren't they? What right— He strode toward the door, and stopped as the nurse went past, white uniform swinging, and started up the stairs, climbing easily, with competent up-thrust of her young body. Dr. Welch picked up his rough overcoat, wound a yard or more of woolen muffler about his neck, clapped on a cap, the ear-flaps drooping, dejected rabbit fashion.

"See here, Welch, how can you be sure about Bill? His head—" That honest, sturdy mind of his— Good God, if—

"I'm never sure of anything. But the symptoms are good. I'd like some X-rays, but I couldn't risk moving him tonight. Ambulance got struck twice today. Almost delivered Mrs. Martinezzo's sixth in a snow bank. Miss Brown's a good nurse. There's nothing to worry about. Take a drink, get to bed, get to sleep. They had a lucky squeak."

Arnold's hands twitched, needing to lay hold of his rough sleeve, to detain the man.

"I heard the other day you'd kept the children here." Dr. Welch pulled on a bulky knit glove. "Why don't you get a housekeeper? Plenty of nice refined widows around for such a job."

Arnold stiffened. "A housekeeper wouldn't prevent accidents. The children are not being neglected. They prefer it, staying here."

"Some pleasant, wellbred woman—someone on hand in case things did happen. Make it easier for all of you. Easier for Frances. Been pretty hard on her today if she hadn't caught you. Difficult to locate you sometimes."

He couldn't know that Nichols had caught him halfway across the yard! He meant the night Candace had died. He meant a hell of a lot more than was any of his business! "You keep your refined widows. I won't have one of them under foot, sitting down at the table with me, a stranger hired to be part of a family. Ugh, it would drive me mad. Frances is old enough to take a hand. It doesn't hurt her any."

The doctor picked up his worn brown bag and turned to the door, an unwieldy figure in his winter wrapping. He looked at Arnold, a flash of irony lighting his tired, wise face. "I hadn't actually picked you out a widow," he said. "But I've known your children most of their lives. Good

bunch. Their mother gave them a good start. What you do is none of my business, except that I'm fond of them."

"Good God, don't you think I'm fond of them?"

"I suppose so." The doctor's eyes met his a moment, shrewd under folds of eyelids. I know a good deal about you, how could I help it? said his glance. "It's Frances I was thinking of, in particular. She's smart. You don't want to tie her down here, just when she should be starting her own future. Get her to talk to you. She's got a notion you may not approve."

"I must say—" Arnold felt a confused irritation: the doctor seemed to have a fistful of ideas about him, about the household, so many that those he pried out at random made no coherent sense—"that my daughter's future is the least of my troubles tonight."

"I suppose so. No time to bring it up. I was just thinking about it. She's almost through school. You ask her. I'll drop in first thing in the morning. Will you be here?"

"I'll wait till you come. Certainly."

As the doctor opened the door, the cold wedged into the hall, pried up a corner of the rug, waved the draperies. Arnold snapped on the outer light, and watched the bulky figure dark as a tree plod down the driveway. Then he walked, an irritable, nervous pacing, his hands restless, into the empty living room. Confound the fellow for his presumption. He was as sure as God of what he thought, of what he knew. Probably doctors got that way, from having weak and ailing people gazing up at them with helpless, clinging eyes. Why should he, Arnold, feel this unpleasant sense of something shrunk within him, as if the doctor measured him by a gage, a standard, against which he showed too small? Nerves, that was all. They'd never clicked, he and Dr. Welch. I don't like him, but for all that I know he's a man to trust. Arnold shrugged.

"Father!" Frances held back a fold of curtain. "The nurse

says Bill wants you." She clung to his arm, stepping softly beside him up the stairs. "They're going to be all right, aren't they?" Her face had dark violet smudges under the eyes, but a queer, brooding tenderness lighted it. "Oh, they are!"

"Say, what did I do, Dad?" Bill stared up at Arnold. His left hand, slowly, touched the puffy, tallow-white right.

"You got into an argument with a car. Tried to knock it off the road."

"I sh'd think I could remember," Bill complained.

"I shouldn't try to remember, not tonight. Does your arm hurt much?"

"I guess it's my arm." His heavy eyelids drooped, and the nurse, standing behind Arnold, touched his arm and laid a finger on her mouth. After a moment Arnold walked carefully out of the room, balancing against the least noise. Sleep was good for the boy, but Arnold wished they might have put it off, between them, for a few more moments of reassurance. Still, the boy's eyes were clear, it was natural enough the moment of the crash might have knocked recollection out of his head. Only, good Lord, how did children ever live to grow up! Arnold put out a hand against the wall, there in the dimly lighted hall. That must be a mother's thought, he said. Are you turning into an old woman, full of anxiety about the innumerable disasters that your children may not escape? Flesh ought not to be so vulnerable. Flesh, and what else? Growing up was a kind of disaster, too, and one you couldn't prevent.

"You might as well go have your dinner." The nurse stopped a moment in transit to the next room. "There's nothing you can do up here." She had a neat little competent face under her white cap. No nonsense about her, thought Arnold, as he descended the stairs, although he'd heard some of these modern nurses— That was the trouble with growing up, today. Too much wildness in the air.

Dinner was haphazard. Hulda's emotion had damaged her coordination, so that the roast lamb was underdone and the peas were scorched. Frances was distressed.

"If there's something else you'd like—I'll ask Hulda—"

"Sit still! I don't want anything. What ails the woman anyway?"

"She was awfully good. She cried and cried but she kept right on running after cloths and water and helping. It's too bad about the dinner, just when you need to keep your strength up."

Arnold looked across at the solicitous face. She was, actually, beginning to mother him! "It doesn't matter." He smiled at her, liking the way her frown, her worried mouth relaxed. "Keep up your own strength! The doctor said you were pretty fine." (And what else had he said? You don't want to keep her here, just when she should start her own future. Bah! What better place, until she wanted a home of her own?) "I don't see what we'd do without you."

Color ran over her face, and tears filled her eyes. She winked at them, swallowing, and shook her head back. "I was just terrified," she said. "I thought I couldn't move. Then my legs began to run, almost by themselves."

"Good legs," said Arnold, and they both laughed. "Anyway, the kids will soon be as good as new. I hope Candy won't have a bad scar, but even that, compared with what might have happened—"

"Doctor Welch took six stitches. He said it was lucky it wasn't her eye gouged out, or a lot of teeth knocked out, or her jaw broken."

"Frances, for heaven's sake!" Frances looked up, startled, from her calm spooning of sauce over blanc mange. "You make my stomach turn over!"

"But none of those things happened. He was just saying what did, sometimes."

"We don't have to be morbid about it."

"I didn't mean to bother you, Father." Her eyes were puzzled, and she caught her short upper lip between her teeth. Then, as if the day had been too much for her, destroying her usual reticence, her silence at a hint of rebuff, she went on. "I don't think it was morbid. It was exciting, what Doctor Welch said. About how tough the human body is. All sorts of dreadful things could smash it up, and then it could get well again. He said life is strong, or we wouldn't any of us be here. He said about Mother, that she stayed years longer than anyone thought she would. He said doctors helped a little, if they didn't know much yet they were learning all the time." She spread her hands on the table, one each side of the dessert place, the cuffs of her blue wool dress sliding up from round, smooth wrists. "He said I had good hands for a doctor." Soft and deep young exaltation lay on brows and mouth, a novice offering vows to the altar of her own future. "That's what I want to be. Doctor Welch said I ought to tell you."

"Ought to tell me what?" Arnold pushed his chair away from the table and occupied himself with a cigar. Welch must be crazy, saying ponderous things like that to a girl, stirring her up—look at her, white as a sheet—

"That—that's what I want to be. A doctor. He says it takes a long time, and—there aren't many good places where women can go, and so—"

"When you were about Candy's age, you were going to be a bareback rider. That was after you had been to the circus. Remember?" Arnold's smile, the warmth of his voice invited her to share his amusement at this new folly. "And now you've helped Doctor Welch, and think you'd like—or was it Doris who put this into your head?" Arnold stretched back in his chair, one long leg swung over the other, the foot rocking. Take it lightly, he thought. Just a child's notion. No

need to argue with an absurdity. Damn that woman! "Next year what will you see yourself? There's the stage, and of course movie stars!"

Frances sat very still, once her hands had crept out of sight under the edge of the table. The expression of her face changed as if she made haste to shut away the delicate and lovely dream from this mockery. "This is different." Her low voice reproached him. "I'm older now. I've known for a long time. Maybe it was Auntie Dee that made me think of it first. I might not have known I could be a doctor. Mother said she thought I'd be good at it. She said to wait till I was ready for college, and then if I still wanted to— You have to apply early. I'm almost through school."

"My dear child, you don't know what you're talking about. You have some romantic picture of yourself going about healing the sick, saving lives, people admiring you—oh, I know! I can't imagine any worse fate for a girl than medical training. Brutalizing, hardening,—drawn straight into the misery and evil that a man hopes to protect his daughter against. Too preposterous to discuss!" Arnold broke off. Frances had tipped back her head, the line of her throat was tense, but her face was secretive, sullen, almost dull, so far had she withdrawn. How much actual damage had Doris done? What a triumph for her if his own daughter—"See, Frances!" Arnold rose and moved around the table, pushing under all his irritation. "Candace said to wait, because she knew you would outgrow the notion. We've had a bad time today, without your threatening to take away my oldest daughter. If there was no other reason against such a scheme, what would I do without you for years? And Bill and Candy?"

"I could wait till they got a little older." Frances looked at him, the clear edges of her thought all blurred by his persuasive charm. "Or go somewhere near home."

"You aren't deserting us, then?" He was gay, rallying her. This was taking advantage of her, but Good Lord, what other weapon had he? "Then I can breathe again. After all, this is a job, and a pretty big one. Come along. We can settle such things when we come to them. If you're as tired as I feel—" He took her hand and drew her, unresisting, to her feet. "Any time things seem too hard for you—I have no right to tie you down—" words to smother a faint spark of guilt—"I can close the house and pack off the family separately. But I thought you didn't want that."

"Oh, no."

"It's really you, then, who keeps us here."

"I hadn't meant to desert you. I planned it first when Mother was here. I didn't think—" She stopped, confused; her face had lost its dullness, as she moved with Arnold along the hall. "I'll go upstairs," she said, "if Candy wakes up, she might be frightened again."

Arnold watched her climb the stairs. The picture he had drawn of her as center of the household had obliterated the nebulous image of herself as famous doctor. If he had been unfair, playing on her feeling, he couldn't help it. He'd stop at nothing to prevent her turning into a woman like her aunt.

No one had laid a fire. Arnold stared glumly at the powdery ashes, lifted a stick or two from the wood basket, and let them drop back. Too much work. A dust-cloth and whisk-broom in his chair. Hulda must have dropped them. Had she screamed and run, seeing that procession struggle through the snow, men carrying that limp body? Queer how the room, the house seemed to exhale the very scent of shock, of interruption. He would draw the curtains; perhaps the blank windows set the mood.

But when he reached the window he stood there, looking out, one hand shut over a fold of heavy drapery. He could



not tell whether snow still was falling. The wind lifted clouds of snow, whirled it past the windows; it seemed to drive the light itself, to break it into fine dust of whiteness, to scatter it farther than light could reach, so that nowhere was there complete darkness. Arnold's skin prickled, as if an atavistic fear stirred in him, and he was reduced to admit weakness, helplessness against such wind and bitter cold. The house was flimsy shelter. If he left it—he felt himself plunge through drifted snow, bent against the wind—how long would he live? Impatiently he jerked the curtains together, and at the next window he drew them without glancing out.

He listened. Not a sound upstairs. Good. That meant they were asleep. Life is strong. Natural he should feel a trifle shot, after the shock. Frances hadn't helped any. It was in the air, women rushing around trying to do everything men did. License, freedom, no modesty, no innocence left. It was hazardous, growing up in these times. Different when he was a boy. When he was Bill's age. Arnold stretched out on the divan, hands under his head. Thirteen, almost fourteen. He did a little arithmetic, and landed on Maple Avenue, in Michigan, in a yellow frame house. School, his gang that played ball, went fishing, went swimming, made private crude investigations into matters of sex; Saturdays he helped his father in the hardware store, weighing out nails, shining up nickel on the ranges in the back of the store. Saturday night a bath in the washtub in the middle of the kitchen. It was later they moved to a house with real plumbing. Sunday they all went to church and Sunday School. His father was an usher, and passed the collection plate. Lena played the piano sometimes in Sunday School. He could see his mother at the end of the pew, earnest and satisfied in her best silk dress, her clear eyes occasionally warning him or his brother William not to wriggle so much. A safe, sure life, with no doubt anywhere as to what was good, or decent. Was it since the war that the

world had changed, or was life still like that on Maple Avenue? He doubted that it could be quite as simple as that anywhere. His father and mother had known what they wanted for their children, how they wanted those children to grow up. Their own parents in turn had wanted things for them, and hadn't they proved in their own lives the virtue in honesty, industry, a temperate acceptance of religion, a goodness which was as much an avoidance of wrongdoing as anything more positive? A narrow life, perhaps, but wasn't it better for a child to have a background like that, stable, firm, dogmatic?

Arnold pushed himself erect, running fingers through his hair. This thinking was damned hard work. Couldn't take it lying down. What was he trying to get at, anyway? When I was Bill's age, he thought, my father seemed an old man, a finished product. And he was no older than I am now. He was an institution, not a person. I was wary of him, I admired him, Arnold caught for a moment that old feeling of boy bristling against any intrusion from the elders in the family, boy hiding under layers of suspicion, of awkwardness, of resistance the small kernel of private life he must at any cost keep unmolested. His whole conception of his father had been reached during late years, when, rarely, he had seen him.

Did Bill feel that way about him? Any age seemed old to the one who had not reached it. Arnold, at least, had known what his father stood for. And if I don't know that about myself—Arnold sat forward, fingers rubbing along his jaw—what does Bill get?

Well, did it matter? He had grown up on Maple Avenue, and then he had outgrown that way of life. That year of college here in the East his early training had persisted as an occasional sense of guilt too faint to be a deterrent. Nor was he the only freshman of whom that was true. His father had wished him to have a college education, not knowing pre-

cisely why. Another thing Maple Avenue believed in. But at the end of the year he had agreed with Arnold. "Get a job. See if it'll make a man of you. I'm through wasting my money." His mother had cried, Lena had sniffed at him, William tried to find out what wild college boys really did, and after a week Arnold landed a job through a travelling salesman of an Eastern wholesale hardware plant. He had worked. He wanted to make money enough to do as he pleased. He had modified the Maple Avenue idea that industry brought its reward. He had found that shrewdness, a willingness to take chances, a reckless imagination, a deliberate use of some power he had to ride down other men, to make men—or women—like him, that such qualities sent a man ahead on swift heels past the faithful, honest plodders. He remembered suddenly the brilliant excitement in which he had lived those years when almost at the same time he met Candace and discovered that the automobile was the big new thing in America of which he meant to be a part. He had opened the factory, he had married Candace, and here he was.

Lena, he thought, had retained more of Maple Avenue. It was easier for her, being a woman. Less conflict between what she found and what she had been taught to believe. It was queer, he thought—and had that startled sense of breaking through a partition eggshell-thin and brittle which had shut him off from a bit of knowledge he might always have had—that there was no point in time or space where a man discarded standards. He had them, and then one day they were gone, eroded gradually by all the days since last he had looked for them. Perhaps if he knew the moment at which they wore thin, he'd hunt about for new ones. But were there any to be had? Jazz and gin and sex and corruption. The yarns he'd heard, the things he'd seen—take that last country club dance—made him seem a restrained and elderly prude by comparison with the younger generation. And that was the gen-

eration into which his children were growing. He had done pretty much as he pleased, but he had expected other things for them—morals, ideals, whatever you want to call them. He had expected Candace to build up a solid background for them. He had expected, he saw, with a dim perception that irony lurked here, that she would teach them much that he as a child had been taught, as if he hoped it might last them better. What else was there to offer a child? Well, a man expected a woman to preserve the ideals of the race. He rather fancied the sound of that phrase. That was the trouble. Too many women were forgetting their place, girls of good families, with chaos and the devil to pay. He knew at least what he wished for his daughters.

And Bill? He got to his feet and walked the length of the room, shivering. Was the fire low, or had all this heavy thinking made his blood sluggish? He wanted a good life for the boy, and he didn't know what he meant by that. Had Candace known? If he lowered his eyelids, he could see her at the piano, head turned as she listened to her soft notes. He never knew what she played. Or she sat reading, hand shading her eyes, firelight on her fingers, her throat. He never asked what she read. They talked—about weather, politics, what the children were doing, who had called,—but never intimately: what are you thinking, now, *you*? Self protection. Any man with his wife. Hiding, lest she discover too much. Retreating, lest she expose you as a poor thing in her eyes. If she were here tonight, if he could say, What do you make of it all? But if she were still here, then he wouldn't have come this long, blundering path at the end of which he found himself so much less the fine bucko he had always played, so much more a confused man looking at a kind of emptiness. There had been in Candace—countless images of her slipped together, blurring his memory of her so that he could no longer visualize her nor hear her voice, but felt intricately his tacit recogni-

tion of her quality—no gap between her code and her life. And in him—he shrugged. There was no other woman he had ever wanted as his wife. Had she believed that, or had she cared? She hadn't understood, perhaps no woman could, that other women were a game, they gave a fillip to dull days, and in the end were no more, were as over with as a glass of wine, a clean shot at ducks rising beyond a blind in a gray November sky. No use trying to reason that out. Sex wasn't a matter for thought. Too much talk about it nowadays. The only thing he could do was to keep the children clear of it as long as possible. That was what innocence meant, wasn't it?

As far as Bill was concerned, Arnold had the business for him. He could be proud of that. Built it up himself, and look at it! He was hearty with himself about the factory, himself a friend clapping his own shoulder, hauling himself out of bewildered self-decral. That was something to look forward to! He'd expand still more, times were good, he'd train Bill to take things over. That was an answer, of a sort. He waited a moment, biting down to see if the pain was still there. A trifle better. He'd go to bed.



## *Book II*





## Book II

### I.

FRANCES reached for another chocolate—her head gauged the exact location of the box, having made the trip often—popped it into her mouth, and turned back several pages to the beginning of the scene between the lovers. Slowly she reread it, and then let the book slide down beside her on the divan while she tried the scene again, herself in the role of the passionate mistress. Just as she was crushed against him, his mouth pressing her lips fiercely open, Hulda shrieked at her.

"Frances! Didunt you hear me? Your aunt's on the 'phone."

Frances hid the book under a cushion, and sat up. "All right. I heard you." She hoped some day she'd find a book which told more—what they did. This one was pretty good. But like the movies, most of them did a fade-out about the minute the kiss started. She yawned, and strolled down the hall to the telephone.

"Frances? I didn't know whether I'd catch you this lovely day. What you doing with yourself?"

"I was just starting for a walk, Aunt Lena." Frances made a face at the mouthpiece.

"I hope so," said Lena. "I won't keep you. I called about tomorrow. I want to start early, the service is so much better. Will you and Candace get that eight-twenty train? I'll meet you at the gate. And see that both of you have something on under your dresses. The last time we tried on clothes—and look out for Candy's socks. We have to get shoes, too."

"But Aunt Lena, the dresses wouldn't fit the same—"

"A silk slip won't hurt the fit. Now *please* don't embarrass me. The eight-twenty, then?"

"It's awfully good of you to take the trouble," said Frances. "I think I could shop alone, only Father absolutely refuses."

"And quite right. I'm glad of it. I'm only sorry I haven't time to do more for you. Tell him we'll have lunch in town. Then if we aren't through we can use the afternoon, too. You might make a list of what you think you need."

"Oh, we're simply in rags!"

"Tomorrow morning, then. Good-bye."

Frances went slowly back to the divan. It would be fun to go in town if she could only go alone. Will you show me your negligees, something quite handsome, perhaps in satin? And evening gowns. Oh, no, something much more daring than that! In a cat-wink she had a wardrobe not unlike that of the heroine she had just left. But Aunt Lena had definite notions as to what young girls should wear. She would have the trip planned to the minute, like a train time-table, and she would whisk them from one department to another with energy and efficiency. Frances could see the three of them, Lena's sturdy figure well ahead, Frances trying to keep her in sight, and Candace trailing behind, uncomfortable little tail of the kite. Whenever the saleswoman left them to hunt up another armful of dresses or more pairs of shoes, Aunt Lena would pepper them with questions. She didn't seem to mind *what* she asked! And behind the questions Frances felt withheld criticism, as if Aunt Lena compared their life with that of her own family, much to the credit of her own. It was a kind of game, not to tell anything, just to make a politely vague reply. Candy gave things away sometimes. She was so young she couldn't understand that Aunt Lena was trying to Find Out. Just what Frances didn't know herself, but she had watched Father with Aunt Lena often enough to know that he didn't give anything away. Nor did she mean to. And then Aunt

Lena would make up a neat parcel of advice, enough to last until she saw them again, like a supply of stockings and handkerchiefs.

Frances felt herself stiffen in preliminary resistance to Aunt Lena. She could keep herself hidden away, tight and small, where Aunt Lena's implacable common sense and assurance couldn't reach her, nor that adult curiosity ferret out her secrets. It was Aunt Lena's being a relative that made her such a threat to Frances' privacy. Now if it were only Mrs. Barth who was going shopping with them. Adele Barth. Just a few weeks ago she had said, "Why not call me Adele? If we're friends—" Frances had thought of her so long as Mrs. Barth that it was hard to remember the Adele. She wouldn't be back from Washington until next Wednesday. Frances counted the days on her fingers: Friday, Saturday—six whole days yet. It was queer, how missing her hurt. She would be back soon. Frances tried to decide just where it was that missing a friend ached in her. Loneliness was like a dark cell, too small, cramping you, smothering you; all your thoughts and feelings were pushed back, bent back, barbed, inside you. Having a friend let you out; running, singing, flowing like a river. She would ask Adele if it felt that way to her. Not, she added to herself, that I could expect her to miss me as much as that. But the whole year had been different because of Adele Barth. Frances liked to go back to the beginning, to see if she could remember everything.

It started that Sunday in the fall, when Father had taken them all to dinner at the Tavern. Frances had already found that the bright picture of herself as indispensable center of the household did not fill her days. Bill and Candy were in school, most of the young people Frances knew had gone off to college or finishing school, and time, which had not existed during her seventeen years of regulated life, suddenly became a burden. Aunt Lena had disapproved. Frances had come into

the living room at the end of what must have been a wild argument, Father had looked so furious. "But she doesn't have to earn her living! Why send her to college and ruin her? I mean to keep her unspoiled and sweet—" then he had seen her. "Frances, your aunt thinks I'm keeping you home against your will. Will you tell her that I haven't bullied you, that you like it?"

Frances had hesitated. It was almost like a reprieve. But when her father smiled at her that way, she had to meet his expectation. So she had said, primly, "I think my place is here, Aunt Lena."

Aunt Lena had snorted. Later she had talked seriously, as she called it, about how Frances should organize her time. "Go on with your music, take French lessons, you're simply too young to be at loose ends."

Frances didn't want to go on with her music. Difficult to explain her feeling about it. She just knew it wasn't hers, she'd never be any better. And why French? But perhaps Aunt Lena had said something which made Father think he should make up for a lack. At any rate, he had actually thought up several expeditions. And the Sunday dinner at the Tavern was one of them. It had been a lovely day; Frances remembered the soft haze through the many windows, as if the woods behind the Tavern breathed off diffuse color from their gold and russet leaves. She had seen the Whitings, their neighbors, at a corner table, and had childishly pretended not to see them, clinging to her father's arm and chattering. (What a charming picture, father and daughter!) Then as her father drew back a chair for her, she gave a start of surprise at his, "There are the Whitings over there. Guess they thought it was a good day to dine out, too."

"My goodness! I never even saw them!" Frances turned to smile, and saw not only the Whitings but Adele Barth. Great dark eyes in an animated face, a scarf of lustrous brown

fur draped over slender shoulders, long white hands. Mrs. Whiting beckoned and Father went across to stand beside their table. Bill and Candy were discussing the menu, with slow, sensuous delight in each item, and Frances could peer around, not really staring, pride expanding in her breast at her father's tall ease, his way of looking so handsome when he smiled. They were all laughing. Mrs. Barth had flung back her head so that laughter ran along her lovely white throat. Frances laughed too, they looked so gay.

"What you laughing at?" Bill wanted to know. "I don't see anything funny. You better pick out your dinner. That waitress'll be here any minute."

"Noldy better come back, too." Candy gave a little flounce in her chair. "Talking to those ole folks."

Father had come back in a moment, still smiling. "That's Mrs. Whiting's sister," he said, unfolding his napkin. "She's been living abroad, that's why we've never seen her."

When Frances glanced around, Mrs. Barth was smiling straight at her, as if she'd heard Frances's eager, "Is she going to stay at the Whitings'?"

Then the three had stopped at the table, and after Father had jumped up and introduced them, Mrs. Barth had said to Frances, "You must come in to see me some day. I've been away so long I don't know anyone." Her voice was soft and rich, like her great brown eyes.

"Yes, do come," said Mrs. Whiting, comfortable and plump. "You can show Adele some of our nice walks."

Frances had waited two days, and then, a great bunch of fall flowers in her arms, marigolds and small chrysanthemums, had walked over to the Whitings, her heart loud in her ears as she rang the bell. She was at the stage where affection floated freely, little feathery impulses, like the floating stage of small sea animals, impelled to find a rock, a wharf pile, anything to which they may attach themselves for growth into their

next cycle. Mrs. Barth had loved the flowers, she had been delighted when Frances explained shyly that the colors seemed right for her, she was enthusiastic about Bill and Candy and Father, she thought Frances was wonderful to stay at home, to fill her mother's place—this with a deeper note in her gold voice. No wonder that her father was so proud of her! Why, anyone could see that he was! Frances's self was a bright bird, preening its feathers, swelling its iridescent throat, stroked into delight by soft phrases. As she dreamed homeward through the early twilight she thought: she's wonderful! I could tell her anything! She likes me. She said come again. "Come again soon!"

That had been the beginning. Mrs. Barth didn't care much about walking, she disliked the cold as the days shortened into winter, she didn't wish to join her sister's bridge club, nor the library board nor the dozen other groups with which Mrs. Whiting busied herself. So she was often alone in the Whitings' living room, stretched out on the divan with a French novel, when Frances pushed the button at the door, and asked the maid if Mrs. Barth was in. Sometimes Mrs. Barth would sing for her, German lieder, little French songs. "If I hadn't married so young—" her hands gathered final chords, tossed them angrily at fate— "I might have done something with my voice. Now—it's too late."

"I think it's marvellous!"

"Too late. But no matter. Come over here and tell me what you've been doing since the last time I saw you."

"You're sure I don't bore you—"

"Bore me? Dear Frances, you help me forget." Her shrug dismissed a brooding past, set her brightly in the present, receptive, sympathetic.

Frances had no curiosity about this hinted sorrow; she was incapable of speculation about Mrs. Barth. All the feathery impulses of affection had attached themselves to the woman,

concealing her, changing her from a person to be wondered about into the way Frances felt when she was with her. She liked to watch the quick gestures of her head, with its shining dark hair so smoothly drawn back of small ears into a knot, with the marvellous dark eyes that looked straight into hers, drawing her heart up to her throat; she adored the foreign clothes—a velvet negligee from Italy, warm brown, corded at the waist like a monk's robe, a rich purple dress with gold and purple embroidery, intricate, elaborate, from Russia, long earrings that swung against the white throat. These she liked as one would adore the trappings of the saint above the altar. But what she waited for, from one meeting to the next, was to pour out herself as libation in hours of talk. Talk about what she had done, about the children, about a dream, and then, daringly, about love, Life with a capital letter, death. She never spoke of her mother, although a need to draw her back in speech about her lay deep under the outpouring of herself. Her father's attitude had suggested that silence was the adult way, and she had tried to follow it. One day she had told Mrs. Barth about her desire to be a doctor.

"But why a doctor, darling? You're much too sweet for that."

"I'm not sweet, really. I'm simply terrible inside!"

"I've noticed that!" Mrs. Barth laughed.

"I am. I'm jealous, and I have a bad temper, and—" Frances laughed, too. "But anyway, I'd like to be a doctor. A doctor's really useful. My aunt is. She does marvellous things for people. Only my father doesn't approve of her. Do you think men don't like women to do things? Except to get married to them, I mean? He just says I don't have to earn my living, but I'd like to do something. Until you came, it was dreadful this fall, not being in school. Someday I'll probably get married, but what will I do until then?"

"I suppose men don't like women to do things. It makes

them independent." Mrs. Barth's voice lost its smoothness, the lines about her mouth were harsh. "If I'd been trained for something, I wouldn't have to crawl back here. You get married, and think your life is settled, and then you—" She stopped, and with brittle swiftness pushed a smile over her bitterness. "I didn't intend to say that. You hit a bruise. I just mean I wish I had a way to earn a living. A way— It's different with you. Your father'll take good care of you."

"But I'd like to *be* something. I suppose it's silly—but I'd like to have people look up to me. I'd like to do wonderful things—like saving their children's lives when they were sick or discovering a new medicine that was better than any they'd ever had. I don't want just to be taken care of all my life." How explain her feeling? She was the archer, with great polished bow and feathered arrow fitted to the cord; she was the bow, she was the arrow; only she could draw back shaft and cord and launch the arrow down dark aisles of years, toward her future. And instead she must do nothing, let the arrow drop, untwist the cord from the carved bow end. "I try not to think about it," she said, "only sometimes it just rises up! I try to think it's enough to do, looking out for Candy and Bill. But if I look out for them much they just think I'm too bossy."

"You'll forget all of this just as soon as you fall in love." Mrs. Barth didn't laugh at her. "It's in the air in this country, girls wanting everything boys have. And it must be dreadful, all you'd have to learn to be a doctor!" She shivered. "I shouldn't like it!" Her eyelids lowered, the long lashes hiding the expression of her eyes. "I suppose though, if your father married again, he would not mind your going away—to some college, say."

"Oh, he'd never do that!" Frances laughed. Father! Why, he was much too old! Anyway—she could not decide where the incredibility lay, somewhere near all thought about her mother.



"It probably wouldn't make any difference." She was a trifle glib, hiding the shock. "Father's really old fashioned. I suppose all fathers are."

It had been Mrs. Barth who suggested that she might come over to see Frances. Frances was delighted. Mrs. Whiting had looked at her queerly when she opened the door for her that afternoon, and called upstairs, "Adele, the Carlton girl is here again."

"Oh, please come! I'm afraid your sister thinks I'm a nuisance, spending so much time here."

"What did she say?" Mrs. Barth was sharp.

"Maybe I imagined it. Just the way she looked."

"It's only that she's cross at me." Were there tears in her eyes, or only a lustre of distress? "She—but I won't trouble you with my troubles. It will be good for me to get out of the house."

Frances had spent the morning in a passion of housekeeping, each task, each order to Hulda and Mollie an act of devotion to the guest. She ordered roses from the florist, and telephoned twice about them, the last time just as the delivery boy leaned his bicycle against the step. She arranged them in a crystal bowl and set them on the piano, so polished that the flowers dropped shadowy reflection. If Mrs. Barth would play and sing, the roses would sway, picking up the rhythm. She warned Candy and Bill at luncheon that if she had a caller when they came home from school, they were please not to go screeching through the house. "If you'd like to meet her—" Frances hesitated, caught by a picture of herself as charming older sister—"come in quietly."

"Who's coming?" asked Bill, and at Frances's "Mrs. Barth," added, "That ole goggle-eyes! Who wants to see her!"

"Bill!" Frances doubled fingers into palms, quivering in swift anger. "She's— Oh, you—when you know she's my friend!"

"She is a little that way," said Candy, reflectively.

"You don't even *know* her!"

"We've seen you. Going over to the Whitings all the time, a-walking along the road with ole Goggle-eyes. You never do a thing with us any more an' you look pretty silly if you ask me."

"You—you have no business spying on me!" Frances's eyelids were hot with embarrassment. Bill's round face had a solemn and forthright disapproval and Candy's eyes, under heavy lashes, admired Bill and investigated Frances.

"Spy my eye!" Bill waved toward Candy. "Weren't we just walking along, Candy? An' you never saw us!"

"Well, it isn't any of your business!"

Bill made his mouth round, shaping it to repeat his epithet.

"Don't you say that again!" Frances stamped her foot.

"Fannie's mad and I'm glad and I know what would please her!" Bill chanted solemnly. "A bottle of rum, a stick of gum, and Gog—" He broke off, grinning. "Come on, Candy. If she wants to spend all her time with that dame, we can find plenty to do."

"Wait a minute!" Frances ran after them. She seized Candy's arm, she pushed back the child's beret, she smoothed the dark bangs carefully over the white scar which ran like a sickle moon from temple to roots of the hair. "You know," she said, fiercely, "I do lots of things with you! My goodness, just because I have a friend outside the family—" She belabored the accusation caught, dimly, under their taunts, that she had been disloyal, that she had withdrawn from the instinctive, tight alliance into which, for safety, the death of their mother had driven them. "Oh, my gracious!" She cuffed at Bill, knocking his bundle of strapped books to the floor. They both stopped for the bundle, their heads cracked, and suddenly they were all three laughing, released from feeling potent through its very obscurity. Candy laughed the wildest,

knowing the least what it was all about, but liking laughter. "Aren't we silly!" cried Frances. "Now hurry, or you'll be late for school!"

When they had gone, she wondered, soberly, whether a new allegiance nibbled into an old one. She hadn't neglected them! She would be careful—but this afternoon was her own, her very own.

She hurried with her dressing. She didn't know just when Mrs. Barth would come. Fastening a belt about her blue wool frock, she sighed, wishing she were tall and lithe instead of—well, almost chunky. She brushed her fair hair; the fine ends ran after the brush like spray, in color and texture like the delicate feathery weed heads, pale yellowish brown above the light fall of snow. At last she had it smooth. She stared at her reflection, lifting her full upper eyelids high, trying to make her eyes large. When she did that the white showed under the iris, like doll's eyes; she could not guess the candor of that gray-blue iris in the clear white, she thought it childish, and the lashes disgustingly pale. Candy, now—with those marvellous lashes, so long they curled back. How did she look to other people? Her upper lip was too short— She sighed, whisking powder over her straight little nose. At least her complexion was good. Some of the girls had awful pimples.

She took a last glance about her room. Would it tell the right story about her, if Mrs. Barth came up to look at it? It was, suddenly, too blue and white, a child's room, with evidence of her childhood all about. A row of her favorite books on the small bookcase: she could tell each one from here by its shape and color. An old doll on the dresser, legs stuck out behind the silver toilet articles. Her room, just as it had always been since her mother had first arranged it for her, and she hadn't really looked at it before. Childish. "I could say I'm planning to have it done over," she thought, and flushed a little, as if the room accused her of disloyalty.

She rearranged the birch logs in the fireplace, selecting one with perfect bark, white curling back from rich russet, for the front. Then she sat down where she could watch the driveway. Two o'clock, three, four. Time was a swamp, she plowed through it, her feet mired in sluggish minutes, would *she* never come, what had happened, where was she, why didn't she come? The ringing of the telephone was a quicksand of despair. She wasn't coming! But it was Bill. He wanted to practice basket-ball, and Candy was going to Norma's to play, and he'd stop for her on his way home. Frances turned her back on the driveway. She'd stop watching, and then, suddenly, fooled by her indifference, a foot would strike lightly against the step, a hand would touch the bell.

Just after five Mrs. Barth came, her face lovely under a drooping hat, the cold air of the winter day breathing from her skin and from the soft fur of her coat. "Am I terribly late? I'm so sorry. I couldn't get away. You haven't stayed in all afternoon for me! Oh, darling! That's why you look so pale. What a charming room! And a real fire. How lovely!"

And now the minutes were swift birds, a dazzling flock of them, swirling silver together to be gone before she could hold one of them back. "How wonderful to have a beautiful home like this!" Mrs. Barth moved about the room in little swoops like a bird herself, a graceful heron, examining pictures, touching the roses, while Frances lighted the fire. And then, before a word had really been said, Father had driven up to the house, with the harsh sound of wheels on gravel, of brakes quickly jammed on, the very sound of the broken hour.

Mrs. Barth had sat down on the divan, touching her hair with jewelled fingers, the string of dark amber beads glinting in the firelight. "I mustn't stay," she murmured, "if your father's come—"

"Of course!" Frances's mouth was cotton-dry with disappointment. "Father! Mrs. Barth is here." Father had come in, nonchalant, charming, had taken Mrs. Barth's hand, had sunk down into the armchair opposite her.

"I dropped in to see Frances." Mrs. Barth's smile was all for the girl, consoling her, saying, Never mind, darling! Another time! "We have become good friends."

"I hoped you'd come to see me." Father's voice had a different note.

"Ho!" Mrs. Barth laughed. "I warn you, I may steal your daughter some day! She's practically saved my life this long dull winter! I didn't know there were girls like her any more."

Frances, perched on a corner of the fender, wound her arms tight about her knees, to stop the awful quaver in her stomach. Grown people said things so lightly: her father could with a phrase reduce her to a child in Mrs. Barth's eyes; Mrs. Barth might quite by accident reveal something Frances had told her never meant for Father's ears.

"I suppose this place does seem dull after Paris," her father said.

"Just that I feel out of everything, after so many, many years abroad. I'm just a bird of passage. I don't really belong here. My sister's very kind—but you know what Sara is! Solid, good. I'm afraid I'm too frivolous for her. But honestly, Mr. Carlton, should I care about the Village Improvement Society?"

"I can't imagine it!" Father laughed. "Who said you should?"

Frances relaxed. She was safe, now they had started this adult game with words tossed into the air between them like bright balls, tossed, caught, tangled in a net of laughter. Father liked it; his eyes were brilliant under the heavy brows, his body had lifted in the chair, alert, as if he actually reached

to catch the gay words. Mrs. Barth swung the long chain of amber on a finger, her lashes swept up and down, her teeth flashed. Frances felt a moment of pride in them that they were so clever. Then she sighed, being too excluded. Father was just saying, "Well, someone ought to show you that this country isn't so dull."

"At least, I've enjoyed this afternoon." Mrs. Barth rose, thrusting her fur collar high about her throat with a flashing white hand. "Good-bye, my dear." Had she heard that sigh? She moved quickly to Frances, held her hand an instant in soft pressure. "I want to see you soon, very soon!"

"I'll run you home," said Father. "The car's right at the door."

"You don't need to," said Mrs. Barth. "The walk is good for me."

"In those shoes!" He scoffed, pointing at the French heeled small pump, slim ankle and high arch of the foot gleaming through chiffon. Frances leaned against the window, watching them drive off, bewildered at the forlornness which suddenly pressed clammy fingers into her throat. It was nice of Father to drive her home, wasn't it? And the front seat didn't hold three comfortably, and she didn't want to rattle around on the back seat alone. If only one of them had said, "Do come, Frances!" and she could have replied, "Thank you, but I must see to dinner," or, "the children will be in,"—or something.

She waited there until the headlights of the returning car struck the tips of trees, stroked downwards as the car rounded the curve and stopped. Bill and Candy scrambled out of the car. Father must have picked them up along the road. If Bill tried his awful nickname on Father— But for some reason Father did not mention Mrs. Barth.

It had seemed a long time before Mrs. Barth came again: was it only the next week? Oh, she'd love to see Frances's

room. "How sweet! Just the perfect kind of place you would have to grow up in!" She flung her arms out to embrace room, childhood; she picked up the doll and tipped it to let the eyes roll shut, laughing tenderly at the pink bow tied in the matted curls. She sang for Frances. The tone of the piano was remarkably fine. Wouldn't Frances play for her? But Frances wanted to sit in front of the fire and talk. Then with a little start Mrs. Barth was on her feet. She must run, before Mr. Carlton came. He would think he must drive her home, it wasn't very nice to drag him out after a long day at his factory. "I'll walk over with you." Frances had hurried for her coat, and when they stepped out of the door, there sat Father in his car! He couldn't have been waiting, he didn't know Mrs. Barth was there.

"Oh, no thank you!" Mrs. Barth slipped her hand under Frances's arm. "We're going to walk."

"It's too dark for Frances to come back alone," said Father. "Do get in. You know it's no trouble." He was lazily imperative, holding open the door.

"It *is* late, isn't it?" Mrs. Barth had gazed up at the sky, amazed to see bright stars instead of a sun. "Well—"

That evening, as Frances played a rubber of checkers with Bill, she found her father eyeing her over the pages of his *Saturday Evening Post*, his heavy eyebrows drawn together. Panic brushed her, soft as mouse-fur. He was thinking about her; she could see him! Most of the time he didn't really think about her, except in an offhand, nonintrusive way—had she taken Candy to the dentist's, she looked well in that dress, what was she reading, and then he returned to his paper or drove away to his work. But when he stared at her under his eyebrows— Bill thumped the board with his checker, jumping three men in a row.

"That's the time I caught you asleep at the post!" he crowed. "Ee-eyel!"

"That's two out of three." Frances drew down the corners of her mouth, pretending she minded. "Shall we play two more?" (Was it about Mrs. Barth?)

"Ten o'clock," said Father.

"Aw, Dad, just a couple more games!"

"Beat it," said Arnold, grinning.

Bill tipped the board, sliding the checkers into Frances's lap. "Loser picks 'em up," he said, and strolled deliberately away.

Frances ranged the red and black counters in the box. It's only that he feels more responsible for us, she thought. When Mother was here he didn't bother— For a moment she had that terrifying sensation she had dreamed more than once this past year, the dreadful fear of one who is lost, who runs wildly through the night, in trackless woods, along the labyrinthine echoing corridors of a huge abandoned building. *Mother*. The only thing was not to think about her. She fitted the corner over the box and looked up.

"You're seeing a good deal of Mrs. Barth?" Arnold's foot made angular motions, as if it danced by itself.

(What had she said to Father?) "Just once in a while." Frances pushed the corner of the wooden box hard into her stomach.

"I should think someone nearer your age—"

"There isn't anybody—I mean all my best friends have gone to school—" (How defend this precious thing without inviting destruction because it was so precious?) "Every girl I went with is away. You know they are!" (And I'm here, because you needed me. She couldn't add that. Perhaps he would think of it.) "Anyway, what difference does how old you are make?"

"An older woman has different interests. She's generous to give you so much of her time. You must be careful not to impose on her."



"Did she say that? Father!" Frances shivered. "Please tell me if she said that?"

"No. She said she was fond of you. But I—well, I hope you're too sensible to have a silly schoolgirl kind of crush on an older woman. If you just enjoy seeing her occasionally—"

"A crush!" Frances was shrill, stirring up a dustcloud of words to hide her feeling. "Why, Father, I'm much too old for crushes! It's awfully funny, your thinking that! And really I don't see Mrs. Barth often. She said she would help me with my French. I thought you'd like that, if I read French with her. Aunt Lena said I ought to do something with my time."

"I suppose—" Arnold picked up his magazine again—"you need a woman to talk to. Don't overdo it, that's all."

Frances held her breath as he opened the magazine, flopping the limp pages idly to find his place. When he began to read, she could slip away, nothing touched, nothing altered. Suppose he had said, as he had said of Aunt Doris, "You aren't to see her any more." If he knew how Frances felt, he might say that. But he wouldn't know. That, thought Frances shrewdly, was one thing about Father. When, at these rare intervals, he did put his mind on you, he never tried to push far behind your words. With things like Aunt Doris or college he didn't even wonder how you felt. He just said what he wanted and then you were wretched for a while, needing so to please him, longing so for what he had denied. He must have liked Mrs. Barth, not found her too this or too that, as he so often did. Suddenly, irresistibly, Frances said, "Don't you think she's remarkable?"

"What?" Arnold looked up, brows drawing together again over blue eyes. "Oh, Mrs. Barth? Oh, yes. Yes. She's quite charming."

Then it was Christmas, with Phil Whiting home from college, and Frances couldn't go to the Whitings because Phil

would think she came to see him. Phil appeared at the door his second afternoon; would Frances like a drive? He'd swiped the old man's car. Familiar and yet strange, a boy she had played with grown taller, with a new drawl in his voice, a touch of bored condescension in his manner. He slid down under the wheel, he talked out of the corner of his mouth as he shot around curves and past decorous drivers, his words whizzed away in the rush of cold wind. The sky was gray-white, with the sun diminished by thin winter haze. He was trying, Frances knew, to impress her. Hints of exploits, of gay wild life, see what a buccaneer your old friend has grown into! "Remember the hot dog stand at City Island? Suppose it's still there?" (After all these years and changes:) It was dusk when they reached the end of the street down the narrow island, the sagging pier was dark and empty against the gray water, a schooner anchored off the point wagged her masts gently. "I'll get the canines." Phil banged open the door of the rickety lunch room, and the thick smell of smoky kerosene floated across the clean saltiness of the air. Frances shivered, and huddled inside her coat. She couldn't ask Phil to put the top up, after he'd explained he'd worked an hour to get it back. She thought of the funny way his throat jumped as he talked, and how red the wind had made his ears, and a kind of uneasiness touched her—or was it just the cold? Phil came back with the rolls, and settled close beside her. "Here, this'll wash 'em down." With wary bravado he produced a flask, uncorked it... "Go on, don't be a prune! It'll warm you up. More ways than one. All the girls drink."

"Honest, Phil, I don't want it." Frances tried to laugh. "I guess you think I'm pretty stuffy."

"I think you need to get around more. You could be nice all right." He tipped back his head for a swallow, eyeing her to see how impressed she was by that. Then he devoured his

hot dog, wiping mustard from his chin with the back of his hand. "Want another?"

"I don't feel very hungry." Frances had found the first bite sticking in her throat. "Here, you eat it," and as he did, she added, almost vindictively, "well, you've got just as good an appetite as ever!"

"Sure, why not? Oh, I've changed some ways." His hand burrowed behind her, between her and the leather cushion, tunnelled through, dug under her armpit, pressed through the thick stuff of her coat over her breast, and clumsily he bent to kiss her. Frances wriggled, and the top of her head came up under his chin, bang! "Aow! Jeese, you made me bite my tongue!"

"I'm glad of it." Frances sat forward, stiffly, away from the ramrod of his arm.

"Aw, come on, Frances. Be nice to me. Let's have some fun."

(They'd talked about it, last year, the girls and Frances. You have to do it . . . or the boys will find somebody else. After a while you get so you like it.)

"But it isn't fun." Frances hugged her coat tight around the queer dark recoil of her flesh. "It—it seems silly. Why, we've known each other years and years."

"We were nothing but kids then." Phil stared at her, sulkily. But words tripped up his purpose, embarrassed him. "You needn't think you know all about me!" He started the car, backed it jerkily off the wharf, bumped over the curb as he turned.

Frances watched the street run past, lighted shop windows, crazy pattern of masts against the dull sky, boats hauled up in the shipyard, men plodding up the dim street from the yard, a dark blurred weariness about their figures, their walk. Phil wasn't a boy she played with; he was an offended male, and the need to placate him troubled her. It was all his fault,

she thought. Why should I— But tropism-strong the need pushed past the faint protest. It was like the feeling she had when Father was annoyed, discomfort, a compulsion to set things right, no matter at what trampling down of pride. Her resentment had no words; its roots were deep in the still obscure growth of her personality.

"I suppose you've changed, really, lots more than I have," she said, craftily. "Going away, and—and having experience."

"You better believe it." Phil rolled an eye at her. "That's what I been telling you. College broadens a fellow." His sulki-ness had gone, and he slid further under the wheel. By the time he had driven the miles home, he had talked himself into excellent humor. Frances was just a kid, but he liked her. Frances was drowsy, her eyelids heavy with the weight of rushing wind; the little car tore along, constantly leaping into the brilliant pool of light from its lamps, seeming always about to overtake the darkness ahead before the light reached it. And when, at the door, Phil said, "How about us going to the Christmas dance at the Club?" she didn't say, "Do you think I'm old enough?" as she wanted to, but, "That would be lovely."

"Be seeing you," and Phil drove off.

"Where have you been until this time of night?" Father stood at the living room door, newspaper crumpled under one elbow, eyebrows meeting.

"Is it late?" Frances felt her face sting scarlet in the warmth. She was so cold her legs ached!

"Is it late!" Arnold mimicked her. "It's been dark two hours, and I had no idea where you were. Riding around—who's the young man? You come in all rumpled and blown to bits."

"It was just Phil Whiting." (What was dark in his eyes, hard in his voice? What did he think?) "I guess I am blown to bits." She laughed a little, coaxing him. "He had to have the

top down, he says no one at college would think of driving with it up, not even in a snowstorm!"

"Oh, is Phil home?"

Frances nodded, pulling off her gloves, blowing on her fingers. She could see her father considering Phil, disposing of him as familiar boy next door.

"What have you been up to all this time?"

"City Island and hot dogs." Father couldn't know that Phil—Why had he been frightened? What did he think she was doing?

"Well—" He smiled, taking the hot dogs as a sign of childishness. "I don't want my girl joy-riding. Too much of that."

"He asked me to the Christmas dance. Is it all right if I go?"

"At the Club? That must be the one Mrs. Barth is chaperoning."

"Did you see her?" (Oh, where, when I didn't?)

"The other day," said Father, carelessly. "Aren't you pretty young for the club dance?"

"Oh, gracious, no! Why, two years ago I went. I came home early," she added, honestly. "But now I'm lots older. Last year it was too soon after—" She had almost said "after Mother died," breaking their tacit avoidance of such words. Her eagerness had made her thoughtless. But if Mrs. Barth was there, the party would cease to be appalling, to tie her into knots for fear no one would ask her to dance. Father simply must let her go!

"I suppose it's all right, then." (If your mother let you go two years ago, he meant.) He ran his fingers through his hair. "I've heard wild stories of that younger crowd—but I can't keep you locked up."

"You know I'm not terribly wild." His anxiety, whatever it was, lay on another plane, not even tangent to any of her present desires, and for a moment her face lost its immaturity and

she smiled at him with tolerance for his inept imaginings. "It will be marvellous! I haven't gone to a dance for ages."

She ran upstairs to shake out of its cretonne cover the party dress Aunt Lena had selected in the fall. Soft yellow chiffon, rather childish, all pleats and puffy sleeves. No use asking for another. Aunt Lena would say, "But you haven't worn that pretty yellow frock once! What nonsense."

"Oh, Frances! Are you going to dress up?" Candy rushed at her, stroking the folds. They followed her fingers in a flutter, rising like a ballet dancer's skirt. "See, I'm electric!" She tried it again, laughing.

"I hope your hand is clean!" Frances thought: it is pretty, flying out that way. When I dance—

"Where are you going?" Candy ducked her hands quickly behind her back. "Are you going somewhere with Phil?"

"Not tonight. Christmas dance."

"Could I go?"

"Oh, no!" Frances hung away the dress. "It's a grown-up party. Now don't look that way, Candy! Wait till you grow up." If Candy cried, Father might even change his mind! But Candy flung herself on the foot of the bed, propped against the blue puff, her blue eyes meditative, her moment of dolefulness gone.

"When I am a little older," she said, "I'm going to parties every single night. Not once in a long time like you."

"You have to wait till you're asked."

"I'll get asked." She peered up at Frances under her lashes. "I get asked lots of places now. I'm going to have fun every minute." She propped her hands under her dark head, her child's body relaxed and straight, her thin arms curved outward like handles of the jar which held the wine of her future. Frances looked at her, something checking her laugh at Candy's assurance. If that was what Candy wanted, she'd probably have it. Even now she had little wiles that amused

people, that made them like her and do things for her. Father, for instance. Why should fear, quick as snake's tongue, dart through Frances, as if Candy's words should be unsaid before God heard them?

"Nobody can have fun every minute," she said, soberly. "You have to work and sometimes you're sick and—"

"I'm going to! You wait and see!"

At that moment the sneeze which had been tickling Frances's nose exploded, not one sneeze, but a fusillade. Candy sat up, giggling. "You look awful funny, screwing up your face! Kerchool!"

"It isn't funny." Frances scrambled angrily for a handkerchief, mopped eyes and nose. Oh, horrors, had she caught cold? "I wish you'd go and get washed for dinner."

"I bet you got cold riding around with Phil. Bill said it was silly to put the top down in the winter, and only college boys would do it. We saw you, only you never see us when you're with somebody."

Frances sneezed again, her back to Candy. She didn't know there was room inside one head for such a terrific prickling! She'd simply die if she had an awful cold, and her nose was red and everything.

When she woke the next morning, her body was a leaden case in which she smothered. She pushed herself out of bed. She would not be sick. The house moved about her, uncertain as a ship, but she propelled herself stubbornly toward the bathroom door. Her heart beat faster and faster until it climbed straight out of her bosom, dragging her after it on a thin thread, up, up— The thread broke and she plunged headlong into black water, drowning. Then from a great distance voices assailed her, people running up and down a remote shore, upbraiding her for drowning, bidding her make prodigious effort. Her eyelids were sealed. If she could unlock them—

Why, it was Father shouting at her. Slowly she lifted her

eyelids, saw him strangely with two alarmed faces before her vision cleared.

"Good Lord," he said, "scaring me like that! Here, drink some water." His arm went under her shoulders, and he held the glass. Water splashed her chin, ran down her neck, ice, concentrated essence of cold, which suddenly cramped her into terrible shivering. "Here, get under the covers." How had she got back here to her bed? His arm was strong around her, and he jerked blankets up to her chin. "Why not call someone if you feel sick? Fainting away—you lie still now. I'll get Dr. Welch."

Then for three weeks Frances had been isolated with a square-faced Canadian nurse. "See if we can prevent the rest of the folks from getting your flu," said the doctor. The first week Frances was swathed layer on layer in the protective indifference, almost oblivion, of illness. But when the fever dropped and she could sit up, at first for a few minutes, she cried a little, secretly, when the nurse was downstairs making disgusting gruels for her, at the things she had been done out of.

Mrs. Barth sent her flowers, yellow roses, with a note, "Get well soon. I miss you." Several times Frances thought she heard her voice, dark and soft; she must have dreamed it, with other crazy fever-dreams.

By the time Frances could come downstairs again, the holidays were over, Phil and the other young people had scattered to college, Bill and Candy tore through breakfast to be off to school. "You can't budge out of the house till you're rid of that cough," the doctor ordered, and Frances found life a listless succession of glasses of milk, produced relentlessly by Hulda, and the taste of cod liver oil forever strong in the back of her nose. Aunt Lena drove out in her new Ford, with magazines and calves-foot jelly, and spent most of her hour doing what she called "jacking up Hulda." Frances wanted to



telephone Mrs. Barth, but a queer diffidence held her even when she stood in the hall, looking at the instrument, imagining the conversation. Perhaps Mrs. Barth no longer cared about her, after all these weeks. Who could care about her, skinny, pale, wobbly-kneed? Father was so busy with the factory that he had little time for a convalescent daughter. Sometimes he didn't get home for dinner. They were running a night-shift, to take care of the rush of orders, and even when he did come home he was either studying sheets of figures, blue-prints of the addition he planned to build, or sitting with that not-here look under his dark brows which meant he was going on in his head after he had laid aside the actual papers.

One morning Frances found a colored postcard in the mail Leonardo had brought. An Atlantic City hotel, a message: Hope you are much better. Am having a delightful time here. A. Barth.

"Oh! She's away!"

Father looked up from the folds of his newspaper; he didn't even ask who, he'd seen the card. "Didn't you know?" He went on reading.

She hadn't forgotten her, then! Frances turned over the card, inspected the rows of windows. No X to mark her room! "Did she tell you she was going? When did you see her?" (Please, tell me about her!)

"She spoke of it. I don't recall— Oh, it must have been one of the times she dropped in to inquire about you. Didn't I speak of it? You were too sick at the time—"

Candy came in just then, and stood against Frances's knee to have a proper knot made in her middy tie. Frances bent her head, blinking at tears. It was too silly, the way everything made her want to cry! But Father might have told her—

It was easier, after that, to telephone to the Whitings. Mrs. Whiting thought her sister might be back in a week or so. How was Frances now? Phil had been so disappointed. Yes,

he'd gone to the dance. He'd called up her cousin Anne at the last minute. (That stick, thought Frances. Well, she hadn't expected Phil to stay home and mourn.) Then Frances listened to a brief maternal eulogy about how hard Phil was working and how well he seemed to be getting along. (What did Anne do, if Phil tried his new game of bold college fellow on her?)

But when Mrs. Barth came back, she was too busy to run in. Her voice hinted, without harshness, "Can't you understand that I might have important things I must do?" She did say, "I want to see you, it's been a long time, just as soon as I can—but there's this unpleasant business in town—" Frances tried not to sound whimperish. "Dr. Welch won't let me out till this silly cough's gone. I—I'm sorry you're so busy."

The day she did at last find time to come was rather dreadful, because Aunt Lena was there, going over the linen, asking Hulda where the three missing sheets could possibly be, and the yellow-bordered bath towels, and Hulda was asking what would she do with sheets, and maybe they wore out. Mrs. Barth was quite different, hearing this dialogue the minute she came in. Solicitous: You're thin, child. Are you eating enough? and all the time her dark eyes, under the white arched lids, running sidewise, thinking of Aunt Lena. When Aunt Lena came downstairs, presently, Mrs. Barth was elegant in brown velvet and fur against Lena's blue knit suit, and Frances listened in constraint to words which seemed to drag shadows after them.

Mrs. Barth was shocked to find Frances looking so run down. She did so wish she could do something. Aunt Lena, drily, assured her everything had been done, was being done for the child. Oh, Mrs. Barth *knew* that. Mr. Carlton was wonderful about his children! She meant just little touches—a woman's hand. Mrs. Fellows had her own family—Aunt Lena's nostrils widened, she drew her chin down so hard she

made a double chin. "I have time for my own niece," she said, and then, "Are you staying long with your sister?" Mrs. Barth's hands fluttered delicately, her plans were quite, quite indefinite. But she must run along, she'd just dropped in to see how dear Frances was, if she could do *anything*, would Frances telephone her? Aunt Lena, planted solidly on sturdy oxfords, knit skirt bagging behind and over her firm knees, blew her nostrils wider as Mrs. Barth draped her sable scarf over one shoulder, touched gloved fingers to Frances's cheek in passing, and walked toward the door. Frances ran after her. "You'll come again, soon?" she begged. "Oh, yes, soon!" But Mrs. Barth didn't look at her; she smiled a little, and slanted her eyes under lowered lids back toward Aunt Lena.

"Well," said Aunt Lena, brusquely, "she hasn't changed much. A few Frenchified airs."

Frances clasped her hands, trembling. "She's my friend," she burst out. "You—you weren't very nice to her!"

"Gracious, child, I didn't do anything." Aunt Lena's blue eyes took on their look of shrewd investigation, and Frances scurried into retreat. Aunt Lena, in her adult armor of assumed wisdom and common sense, was unassailable. "You ought to have more to do with your time." She set her mouth firmly, and Frances smoothed her face into its most ingenuous aspect, thinking, that's Aunt Lena's "I-must-take-this-matter-up look," but if she does speak to Father, she'll just make him cross. If I pretend it's of no importance—

"I really have, lots to do, when I'm well," she said. Quickly, now, draw a herring for Aunt Lena! "You take just the household accounts. Father wants me to keep them. It takes me days and then I never come out even."

"I meant something of your own, a real interest." Lena sighed. "When I see how absorbed Anne is in her drawing—But I suppose if you learn how to run a house well, your time isn't all lost. And I must say—" her voice took on its usual

decisiveness—"although you've done your best, you still have plenty to learn. Would you like me to go over the accounts with you?"

"Thank you, Aunt Lena." Frances could be demure now. Aunt Lena hadn't actually said anything unforgiveable about Mrs. Barth. "But you see, Father showed me once and said I ought to do them without help. I did ask Bill to add up columns." She sank down on the divan, making a small parcel of herself, just to suggest she wasn't really husky yet. "But I'll do that myself next time."

"You need to keep an eye on Hulda. She has ideas of magnificence when she shops by telephone." Aunt Lena crossed to the window, to examine the draperies. "These should be cleaned this spring."

Now it was spring, and for weeks, thought Frances, she had scarcely seen Mrs. Barth. As soon as Dr. Welch had allowed her to go out doors, her feet had walked her straight to the Whiting door. Mrs. Barth had a headache and was lying down. Flushed with disappointment Frances hurried away. She wouldn't ever go again, unless Mrs. Barth sent for her. She was very tired as she climbed the homeward slope. Perhaps the headache was just an excuse. Mrs. Barth no longer cared about her. Doubt was toxic in her blood, and for several days she moped about the house, until Arnold sent for Dr. Welch again. "Are you getting lazy?" He was gruff. "You used to have a spine. Take a walk every day. As far as the village and back. Make up an errand. See that you mind me!" That was when she discovered the circulating library in the village drug store, and began to carry home books with garish jackets and titles as garish, books to tuck out of sight before Father came home. Then one day in the drug store, she saw Mrs. Barth. She fumbled along the shelf of books, and her unhappiness, which had been lethargic, dulling color and shape

and taste and impulse, suddenly leaped, fiery-sharp, to choke her.

"I just want to telephone." The low voice appeased the clerk, who had moved forward with such celerity. "Oh, yes. I see the booth." She came toward the rear of the store, eyes down as her fingers hunted a coin in the gold purse, and the book dropped from Frances's wooden grasp. "Why, Frances!" Her hands flew out, the purse dangled on her wrist. "Darling, how lovely to see you! Where *have* you been?" She swung the girl's hands lightly in her grasp. "You're looking so much better." A spray of orchids trembled at her breast, her eyes embraced Frances luminously. She herself had been having a bad time, she went on, not in apology, rather as if she repeated what Frances should have known. Migraine headaches, just nerves, and all sorts of horrid business to see to, with not a moment to herself. When Frances said, "I thought you didn't want to see me," she chided her wistfully. "I thought I could depend on you to trust me! Just because all these unpleasant things interfere— Why, Frances!" She was going to Washington for a fortnight or so, and after she came back surely they could find time for each other. If only she were free this afternoon, to walk back through the marvellous sunshine with Frances! But she was already late for an engagement—she had to make a telephone call about it—"No, don't wait for me, I must hurry." Was she over-emphatic about that?

Frances had to select a book. She could see, over the rack, the narrow booth, and behind the dingy pane of glass the averted head, the expressive shoulders of Mrs. Barth. Once she threw her head back, as if she laughed, and then she leaned closer to the instrument, the droop of her head, the thrust of her shoulder a pantomime of intimate cajolery. Like eaves-dropping, watching her there. Frances pulled down a book and thumbed through pages, pretending absorption. Her imagination did not move jealously into Mrs. Barth's life apart

from her; she was incapable of curiosity about Mrs. Barth, knowing her only as the bright figure about which were constellated all her impulses of affection, of confession, of young worship. Trust her? Forever! The folding door of the booth clattered back, Mrs. Barth stared an instant, eyebrows high, seeing Frances still there. Then she said, lightly, "'Bye, darling. I'll call you the minute I get back from Washington." When she had gone, the scent she wore lingered faintly, rich and dark like the tones of her voice. It must come from the close booth where she had stood, talking.

Now in six more days she would be back, and release Frances from the cramped space of loneliness. It was almost time for Bill and Candy to come home. Frances might walk down to meet them. She hadn't been outdoors all day. Nothing to do but walk along muddy roads. As she went to the hall closet for a jacket, the telephone rang again. Father. Was everything all right? He wouldn't be able to get home for dinner; in fact, he might have to stay in town all night. Oh, dear, thought Frances, again! "But, Father! We have to have some money." She told him about Aunt Lena and the shopping trip.

"Ask Lena to advance you some, and I'll mail her a check."

"She never gives us enough."

"My dear Frances, I can't come home just to give you spending money. I'll call Lena and explain." He gave a little grunt, clearing his throat of irritation, and added, genially, "I may not see you till tomorrow night, then. Have a good time and take care of Candy."

Frances made a wry face as he hung up. Aunt Lena would want to know just what she wanted every penny for, feeling a right to investigate what came from her pocket. "Your father ought to make you a regular allowance," she would say, again. And Frances would explain that by waiting for the proper moment she got more than any allowance.

Aunt Lena stood waiting at the barrier when Frances and Candy hurried from the train, walking close together among so many heedless strangers. Her presence released them from a momentary panic in which they felt themselves too young, too inexperienced to move into the intricateness of the city, with its hurrying crowd, its assault upon every sense. Aunt Lena reassured them of places on earth where sound and smell were easy and familiar to them, where the people who passed gave them identity, knowing who they were, Frances and Candace Carlton. Candy let go her tight grip of Frances's arm and ran to greet Lena, her little dangling handbag, her white cotton gloves again important items.

Aunt Lena convoyed them expertly out of the station and along Forty-Second Street. Difficult to walk three abreast. Frances withdrew; she followed Aunt Lena's sturdy back, eyeing critically a worn matty edge on the fur collar, wrinkles pressed into the black cloth by Aunt Lena's solid rear. Candy clung to Lena's arm, as if she needed ballast for her buoyancy. Frances put on what she hoped was an expression of aloofness, so that none would mistake Lena for her mother, perhaps none would even think her an Aunt! But she followed briskly, taking care that nothing but her own thought separated her.

At the corner of Fifth Avenue they waited for the green light. Aunt Lena turned. "Does Arnold stay in town over night often?" she asked abruptly.

"Did he telephone about the money?"

"Yes. He said he couldn't get home. I don't like it. I thought he'd given up—I mean someone ought to be there."

"He is there mostly." Just then Lena hooked her with her left arm, and the three of them made part of the wave plunging to the other curb. "Just once in a great while he's too busy," shouted Frances, and Aunt Lena made a noise like Hrrumph, not very loud. "And anyway," Frances wriggled

her arm free, and her cheeks burned, "I'm not a child, and Hulda's there."

Aunt Lena closed her mouth firmly. Now what else do you want to know, thought Frances. Old nose!

There was no time for family affairs during the next hours. By one o'clock the long list Aunt Lena carried had a pencil line through each item, Frances was hollow with fatigue, Candy drooped, Aunt Lena's felt hat had slipped up on her high forehead, and strands of hair sprayed under the brim. "We'll go up to the dressing room and spruce up a little," she said, "and then find a place for lunch."

Luncheon for Aunt Lena was a necessity, not a chance for a delightful adventure. Candy wanted to go to the hotel where Noldy always took them, but Lena said no, that was all right when there was a man, but she knew a clean little place very near, prompt service, good simple food. She marshalled them around a corner and along a side street past groups of loft workers, fungus-faces pallid in the spring light. "Here it is, the Blue Bonnet." Down two steps into a dim, long room, women packed so closely on small chairs about small tables they seemed bizarrely to be creatures with no legs, just heads, hats, loosened furs, an occasional hand, the chatter, the clatter of silver and china on bare wood pitched high and feminine. Perhaps there wouldn't be room for them! But the hostess beckoned and they pushed between plump shoulders to a wall table.

"I like it much better where men go," said Candy.

"Nonsense." Aunt Lena wedged herself into place. "Now we'll just take the regular luncheon, and milk. That will save time."

"With music," said Candy, mournfully, "and white tablecloths and a waiter with a napkin on his arm."

"I'm afraid Arnold is spoiling you," said Lena. "All that magnificence belongs to a special occasion, not a plain shop-



ping trip. Now let's see if we have seen to everything." She unfolded the list from her purse, and with a stub of pencil began to recheck the items.

"But," said Candy, "if we were at the Plaza, then it wouldn't be a plain shopping trip."

"Don't harp," said Lena. "I am glad we found that little blue coat." She reviewed the morning, comfortable in her sense of achievement. Not bad at all for half a day. Those piqué dresses would fit all right by summer time. Frances wasn't going to stay as thin as this. Frances stopped listening: enough to live through that morning once! Under cover of the table her fingers slid into her purse. It was safe in its smooth box, the little enamelled vanity case she had bought for Mrs. Barth. She hadn't had much time, just a snatch when she could elude Aunt Lena, intent on socks for Candy. She had seen it at once, all green and gold, with the sweetest way of popping up the flat lip-stick at a finger-touch. "Imported," the clerk had said. "Very new." And then Aunt Lena, "Where have you been? You mustn't wander off. We might get separated."

"Drink your milk, Frances." But she wasn't hungry. The close, foody, crowded room, with voices rocketing under the low ceiling, pinched out her appetite. Candy ate deliberately through every course, prolonging her chocolate sundae in minute dabs. "Don't play with food, Candy," said Aunt Lena, as Candy resmoothed the shrinking mound.

"Oh, I'm not playing. I don't want it to be gone."

Grand Central, when they entered it later that afternoon, had, even more than in the early morning, the exciting tension of a spot in space where countless trajectories intersected briefly, trajectories along which human missiles sped toward all their varied ends. Half an hour before their train. Aunt Lena led the way to the waiting room, and looked about for seats. She tucked Candy into the corner of a long bench, and wedged herself and Frances into a space on one opposite, so deter-

minedly that after a moment, as if pried out, a bulky man got up and stalked away, bundles and all. Aunt Lena settled back.

"This isn't much of a place to talk," she began, inclining her face close to Frances. "But I don't know when I'll have another chance."

Light-foot, something stood poised within Frances, ready for flight.

"No use trying to talk with Arnold, especially if—" Disapproving grooves deepened past her mouth, her cheekbones and nose shone. "You're growing up, you're old enough to understand. Even Sarah Whiting's worried about it."

Frances could see Candy watching, her small nose pointed, trying to sniff out the words. No place to run to, nothing to do but sit woodenly, waiting.

"I suspected as much that time she came in. Adele, I mean. Sarah was fond of your mother, she likes you, and even if Adele is her own sister, she sees through her. I won't have her using you as a cat's-paw."

Frances pressed her knuckles against her mouth and stared. She saw the way separate hairs grew in Lena's eyebrows, bristling toward the bridge of the nose, lying smooth toward the temples.

"Not that I think Arnold will turn out to be her chestnut. Of course she's crazy to catch another husband, no money, no position. But coming to the house, pretending to come to see you, hanging around until time to meet Arnold. All that time you were sick— I'm not blaming you, Frances. But Sarah can't do a thing with Adele. She never could. I wouldn't like it anyway, a young girl mooning about an older woman. Even if you are lonely. But when Sarah spoke about it, I said I'll tell Frances. It might make you quite unhappy if I didn't warn you."

Quick, quick! Shelter, covert, before Aunt Lena saw her stripped, naked! Shrink into a grain of dust under a leaf, a

blade of grass. "My goodness!" Her laugh was too like a nervous whinny. "Why, I haven't even seen her for weeks!" (Oh, Peter, before the cock crew!) "She's been in Washington. Not that it makes any difference to me. But I don't think Mrs. Whiting's very nice, talking about her own sister that way."

"She's no nearer Washington than right here in this town," said Aunt Lena. "Sarah's a kind woman. She spoke to me because she felt she should, on your account. Your father—well, he's had experience enough. Adele's divorce would label her for him. I resented very much her using you as a blind to get into the house at all hours. I'm relieved to hear you say it doesn't make any difference to you." Aunt Lena laid a firm, affectionate hand on the girl's knee. "You have a tendency to idealize people, you know. Your mother always did."

The voice of the train announcer rolled amplified over the minor noise of the station, Gabriel through his trumpet, sonorous with doom. Frances sat very still, distinguishing no words, while with finality the end of faith, the end of beauty, decked out with trickery and ridicule echoed about her. She said to herself, it isn't true, and as she said it everything remembered since last fall clicked into a new posture, like the sudden shift of figures in a ballet, and she knew it was true. Perhaps she had almost known for a long time.

"It's time to go now," shouted Candy, jumping up, her precious parcels clasped to her stomach—a spotted tie for Bill, a ball for Dickens, a whisk-broom with a gnome's head handle for Noldy.

"That's a Chicago train he's calling." Aunt Lena looked at the clock. "But perhaps the gate is open for yours. Have you got everything?"

The guard let Aunt Lena go through to the coach with them. Candy selected a seat on the river side of the train, bouncing herself into it, and Frances sat beside her. "When

will all our beautiful new things come out?" exclaimed Candy, and, "Oh, we have had such a grand time, and thank you so much, dear Aunt Lena!"

"I hope Father doesn't pass out when he sees the bills," said Frances. She had to say something, to break the final scrutiny Lena bent upon her. "We'll say you were terribly careful and it doesn't happen often."

"Oh, he has lots of money." Candy recounted her parcels and stowed them between her and Frances.

"You must all come down for dinner soon." Aunt Lena pecked at their cheeks, and stood another moment, tucking stray locks under her hat brim. (She can't say anything more, not with Candy here, thought Frances, smothering under the close solidity of her aunt. Oh, hurry, go away, before I scream!) "You haven't spent the day with me for a long time." An uneasy awkwardness held her, separation demanding some more pointed phrase.

"Heavens, it's warm in here!" Frances jumped to her feet, wriggling out of her coat. She folded it with quick hands, and stood on tiptoe to lay it in the wire rack. "There." She had no concern beyond the comfort of the moment, sinking down again beside Candy.

"I'll tell the conductor your station." Aunt Lena started along the aisle, followed by Frances's gay, "We know where to get off!"

The two girls were silent until Aunt Lena moved along the platform past their window, waving to them. Then Candy opened her blue eyes very wide at Frances. "What *was* she talking about? I couldn't hear a word, and she looked so—so important."

"She was just talking." Frances pressed her hands together: here's the church, and here's the steeple—"You know how she does."

"Well—" Candy grinned, impertinently. "It's always about

something for our own good." But other people were coming into the coach now, a newsvender wheeled his rack of magazines along the platform, there were things to watch more interesting than a moment of Aunt Lena, and Frances could lean back stiffly against the seat, could open her purse to see if their tickets were still there, could close it abruptly as her fingers touched the little glazed box.

She must have been laughing at her all the time. Despising her for being so simple. Shame dried her throat, until she couldn't swallow. She hoped she wasn't going to be sick, right there on the train. Perhaps Aunt Lena was wrong, being jealous of so much beauty— No use. She *knew*. The knowledge had a Procrustean quality, stretching her too suddenly to a perception of treachery, wrenching her into a kind of numbness, in which she thought: no one must know. She must act as if nothing had happened. Candy settled comfortably against her as the train climbed out of the sheds and clattered along its dingy canyon out of the city.

When they reached their station, Mr. Whiting lumbered down the steps from the coach ahead. "Give you a lift home," he said, "my wife's here somewhere."

"Oh, no thank you." Frances shook Candy's arm warningly. "Father is meeting us." She held Candy firmly until Mr. Whiting vanished behind the building.

"Noldy isn't here," said Candy. "How could he be when we didn't know which train?"

"I don't want to go with them." Frances pulled Candy toward the station. "We'll telephone." She found a nickel. "You call him up, Candy. My head aches." She was afraid, suddenly, that hearing his voice she might begin to cry. Had he, too, laughed at her? She could see them, Father and Mrs. Barth, driving away together, could hear Father, "I hoped you came to see me!" could feel, musk-pervasive, the subtle change

in tone, in manner. Father hadn't laughed at her. He hadn't even thought of her.

"He says take a taxi," called Candy, running back. "He an' Bill are rolling the tennis court. I wish I'd been home! Bill never told me he was going to roll the court."

Father and Bill were very gay, clumping in with yellow mud thick on their shoes, smeared on their khaki trousers. Bill had a lump in his hair. "Frightful muck yet," he said. "Have to roll it about a dozen times, I guess." Father wanted to swap gifts with Bill. He adored speckled ties. Then he hugged Candy, shaking her out of a brief despair lest her gnome-headed whisk broom did not please him. And Frances heard all the nonsense remotely, as if she drowned fathoms deep where no light lay, and all the words skipped about on the bright surface, like water-skaters.

"Last one ready for dinner gets the chicken neck!" shouted Bill, pounding up the stairs with Candy hard after him. Frances followed, her body heavy to lift step by step.

"Are you tired?" Arnold paused on a step beside her. "You seem rather glum."

"Tired? Oh, goodness no." Frances laughed. "We did about a million things, of course, you know Aunt Lena." And then, without her volition, as if she were a ventriloquist's puppet, a question came a little shrilly from her lips. "Where is Mrs. Barth staying in town?" (If he says, why, she's in Washington, isn't she? then none of this would be true.)

Arnold stared at her, the relaxed good-humor of his face, of his whole posture stiffening, his eyes suddenly hard under contracted brows. "Just what are you implying?" he said. "Has Lena—" His stare prodded at her. He was angry, not casual, not indifferent, and Frances knew his anger vaguely as proof of more than Lena had said.

"I just thought you might know," she said, hastily. "I didn't have her address. I had something of hers—"

"Why should you think I'd know?" His anger wavered. How much do you know, what are you getting at, probed his eyes.

"I thought she might have mentioned it, that's all." Frances moved on up the stairs. Her understanding of what his anger meant was like that of one who learns a new language, who knows but a few words, and whose eye travels over pages, guessing at a little, thinking, presently I shall read this page. And for once his anger was this page to puzzle over, not a mood she must spend herself against.

Frances closed her door and peeled off sweater and skirt. She stood with them dangling from her hands; her heart seemed to have dropped into her stomach—at least something pounded there. Perhaps, hopefully, she was going to be sick, and needn't go down to dinner. But the pounding subsided. She must hurry and dress, she must act as if nothing had happened. Nothing had.

It wasn't difficult to get through dinner. The self your family expected closed around you, a useful shell, and you crouched in it, making proper motions. You were the Spartan boy, cloak folded over the fox, a little red fox with brilliant eyes and cruel, pointed mouth. You were the clown who laughs while his heart breaks. She looked at her father, his face relaxed and appreciative at Candy's sly imitation of Aunt Lena with the shoe salesman. He had been angry, thinking she knew something about him and Mrs. Barth. What? He was so easy, so assured, so formidable in his male power. (He's experienced, Aunt Lena had said. He won't be Mrs. Barth's chestnut.) He ceased suddenly to be just Father, an accepted, unexamined figure in the fabric of her life, and turned into a stranger with a secret life quite apart from that of the house. She ducked her head as he looked up.

When at last it was possible to say good-night, Frances undressed hastily and flung herself into bed. Now I lay me down

to sleep... oh, please let me sleep! Count sheep, if I should die—oh, sleep before the fear that crept after her like a shadow, like a taint on the wind overtook her. Unhappiness and the long day had drugged her, and she did sleep for a few hours. When she woke the house lay so still it ceased to exist. Through an opened window the stars moved in a dance like slow fireflies. How could they? Frances stared at them. Then she heard the wind, running past the house not in gusts but steady as a river, until she lost her own breath listening for the end of the world. It was bending branches against the sky, and the stars wove in and out behind them. Then under the rush of wind she heard another sound, as unending as the wind, a vibration that might have been the stars in voice, shrill-sweet, trumpets made of no earthy metal. Frances sat up, arms hugging her knees, to listen. Suddenly she was crying, without a sound, tears filling her eyes. The hylas were singing. Mother had loved them. "We must walk past the hollow tonight, it's surely time for the hylas." Frances could hear her. But why tonight should she weep for her mother? Or was it herself she wept for, a self humiliated, stained with a kind of infamy because she had been tricked?

Not knowing,—as who does?—what to do with the fact of death, Frances had tried to push it out of sight, out of thought. She and the other two had pressed close together, as if thus they might hide the empty space. Now a second time a relationship was shattered, and this she had to bear alone. Bill and Candy had resented from the beginning every hint of her devotion, but that was jealousy, as if she subtracted the devotion from her allegiance to them. They couldn't have known—and yet what had Bill said, infuriating her: "I see Goggle Eyes timed it again to get a free ride home with Dad." And Father—he knew I thought she was *my* friend! He didn't care. Perhaps he would marry her, bring her home here to this house. (She was beautiful.) That was what would happen.



Candy and Bill would hate it, they would blame her. "If you hadn't been so silly!" Trailing one of her exotic, scented negligees about the rooms, and Frances trying to hide away, to escape the taunt, implicit and never spoken, "Weren't you the conceited fool to think I cared for you? Couldn't you see what I was after?"

The picture had obsessive persistence, once Frances had conceived it. "I must go away," she thought. "I couldn't bear it to stay." The wind dropped suddenly, and in the stillness she heard again the hylas, plangent, minor, and her mother, "There's a definite cadence, if you listen carefully. Three-four time." For so long she hadn't thought about her mother, and now, with the hylas, came her clear, composed, voice. "If ever you're in trouble, and I'm not here,—" had it been in the spring that she had said this?—"there's Doris. You can always depend upon her. Remember. Even if you haven't seen her for a long time."

Father would be furious. Frances shivered and crept back under the blankets. She wouldn't tell him. She'd run away, the first chance. Aunt Dee wouldn't pry, if she just said, "I can't bear it. Can I stay with you a little while?" Her head was so heavy she couldn't think just what she would say. But she would go.

## 2.

Arnold stood on the terrace, smoking. The rain of the afternoon lingered as light fog through the trees, drizzle over the wet black rocks, the sodden piles of rusty branches and leaves. Dominick should have cleared away that rubbish, not left it where he had raked it off the flower borders. The whole place looked unkempt, neglected. "Keep the grounds just as Mrs. Carlton had them," he had told the man. Someone had to keep an eye on Dominick. Be good for Frances to take more interest in such things. She'd done nothing but mope around the

house since that flu she'd had. Candace had begun her gardening on paper as soon as the first gay catalogues arrived. It was, thought Arnold, a desirable occupation for a woman. He himself had no time for it, but he liked the effect. Made the place look as if someone cared for it. He'd speak to Frances. Just yesterday he'd noticed the cold frames,—they'd cost a pretty penny, too, that last spring Candace was alive—unused, panes of glass broken. What had Candace meant to raise there? He hadn't paid much attention to her plan.

He knocked ash from his cigar and stepped into the living room, the draft as he closed the door crackling the scattered sheets of Sunday newspapers. Did that mean Frances was still in bed? She hadn't come down for breakfast. Before dinner Arnold had stopped at her door. She lay very still in the shadowed room, her face turned to the wall. "Are you sick, Frances?" She'd been moody last night at dinner. "Or just being lazy?"

"I'm not sick. I don't feel very well, that's all." She didn't wish any dinner, she'd get up later.

"I suppose you overdid yesterday." Her silence suggested that further inquiry from him might be indelicate.

He had planned when he woke that morning to give the day over to the children, to make up for the past few weeks. Not that he'd really neglected them, but he had spent some of his few leisure hours—well, elsewhere. If Frances would make an effort they could all have a pleasant day together. Not, of course, that she deliberately rejected this offer of himself. But she lay so quietly that Arnold thought she might have fallen asleep again, and he went down to dinner. As he descended, he thought again of that moment on the stairs last night, when she had asked that question, "Where is Mrs. Barth staying in town?" He'd been raging, thinking her innocence a mere pose, her question an accusation, almost as if Candace spoke. Just as well that affair was all washed up. Not likely

Adele Barth would show up here again. But it had been amusing and he'd by no means had the worst of it. There'd been good, gay hours, when he felt anything but a serious family man. A good chase, and if neither of them had won, he hadn't lost. He hadn't known how far she'd go, a divorcee, used to French ways, and when she moved into town he thought he had her. She was a cool piece, with this other man, a broker, foreign bonds, someone she'd known abroad, as her trick card. See, if you want me, speak up. He'd really admired her subtlety, that last interview. He hadn't said, I won't marry, she hadn't said, I'm out for nothing less. She'd sighed. "I am afraid this is our last meeting. I think I shall marry Frank." She displayed all her wiles for the last time, but he knew her sensuousness was no deeper than her white skin, her hint of passion was assumed, sprayed on like the heady scent she used. Glamorous adventuress was the part she had played to start him in pursuit. Under all that manner and pose she was in fact a conventional small town female, out for a husband, working hard at it because she wasn't any chicken. Oh, she had liked him pretty well, no doubt about that, but never quite enough to forget what she was after.

The Sunday he had bestowed upon the children had turned out none too brilliantly, beginning with Frances's refusal to participate. Mollie had been sulky about giving up her afternoon out to stay with Frances. Then Candy and Bill couldn't agree about where to go. Finally Arnold packed them into the car, still arguing, and drove off. The side roads were sticky with spring mud, the main roads had the sluggish interference, of Sunday traffic, and when they reached the beginning of the trail which wound through woods to the rocky crest of a high hill (Candy's choice for their walk) rain drops were spattering on the windshield. They had waited, cars blatting as they came round the curve of the narrow road. But it wasn't a shower, it was a downpour lashing at the car, roaring in the

gutters, flowing over the black road. "We may as well go home." Arnold had driven on, hunting for a place to turn.

"If we'd started sooner," said Bill, mournfully, "and gone to my place—that wasn't so far—"

"Pipe down!" Arnold shouted at him. Rain was damp on his face, as if it beat through the solid glass. "We'll be lucky if the car doesn't stall in this." That at least had not happened, but the rain dragged out the drive home. Well, when they had supper they'd all feel better.

Bill came in, puffing over a basket of wood.

"Why carry the whole woodpile at once?" asked Arnold. "You want to strain yourself?"

"Aw, that wasn't heavy." Bill dropped it, and sticks bounced off. He squatted on his heels to lay the fire, knocking over the tongs, crunching whole sheets of newspaper into wads. A page of the comic supplement stopped him, and he balanced there, reading. Arnold looked at him, close-cropped sandy head intent, posture like a frog, gray sweater riding up under his arms, disk of striped shirt between it and the trousers. At least he'd stopped his infernal racket for a minute.

"Supper's all ready, Noldy." Candy spied Bill. "Oh, lemme see that one. I missed it this morning." She leaned against him, he lost his balance, and the two of them sprawled. Arnold reached a hand to Candy and pulled her, giggling, to her feet.

"Leave the fire till after supper, Bill. And the funnies, too. What about Frances? Have you called her?"

"Her door was tight shut."

"Go up quietly, Candy, and see if she doesn't want something to eat. She needn't dress. Just slip on something warm and come down. If she can't do that, I'm sending for Dr. Welch, that's all."

"Tell her to slip on the top step," said Bill, solemnly, "and she can come down easy."

"Oh, Bill!" Candy's shriek of laughter made Arnold smile. "Isn't he a scream, Noldy?"

"Why read the funny paper with Bill around?" Arnold pushed Candy toward the door. "Skip! Tell Frances we're waiting."

He strolled toward the dining room and a moment later heard Candy, breathless, in the hall above. "She's not here! Why, she isn't anywhere up here!"

"Nonsense. Call her." Arnold turned abruptly on Mollie, who edged through the door bearing a tray with cups of hot chocolate. "Frances didn't get up, did she? Has she been downstairs?"

"No, sir. I haven't seen her since I took up a glass of milk after dinner." The cups clattered, and Mollie set down the tray. "She said she didn't want anything."

"She isn't here," called Candy again, and Arnold climbed the stairs. He stared with a feeling of stupidity into her empty room, the bedclothes in a little mound, as if she had just wriggled out. "I looked in every room," said Candy, her eyes round. "Her pajamas are in the bathroom on the hook, so she must of dressed and gone somewhere."

"But in this rain! Without a word—" Arnold didn't like it. His uneasiness put on the mask of anger. "She's no business to do a thing like that!" He jerked open the door of her closet. How tell what she had worn, what she had taken (Taken? Did he think—) when he didn't know what she had? She ought to keep things in better order. On the white dresser lay all her toilet articles, the set she had selected when she graduated, long-handled mirror, brush. . . . Why, for a ridiculous moment he had thought she might have run away! Frances, who never looked at a boy. He'd imagined her feigning illness until they were all out of the house.

"It's only six o'clock," said Bill, from the doorway. "She probably didn't expect us home this soon."

Arnold stamped down the stairs. Inconsiderate, inexcusable. Yes, her hat and coat were gone from the hall closet. "Where were you, Mollie," he burst out at the maid, "that Frances couldn't leave some word? You were supposed to be on hand."

"I was, Mr. Carlton." Her sallow, neat face was distressed. "I was here all the time."

"Why the devil didn't you see her, then? No one called?"

"No, sir. That is, only my friend. He wanted me to take a ride with him, and I said I couldn't go." Her face flushed, and she rubbed the back of her hand across her mouth.

"I see. You were so busy with him in the back entry you didn't pay any attention to the rest of the house." Arnold jerked back his chair and sat down. "Don't make any more excuses." She scuttled for the kitchen, the stiff bow of her white apron like a bunny's tail.

Candy and Bill slid into their chairs, and Arnold served them.

"Where does Frances go around here?" he asked. He needed something concrete, a place to which he could direct his imagination, to be rid of the queer uneasiness which nagged him.

Candy looked under her lashes at Bill, who ate stolidly. "She doesn't go much of anywhere," she said. "Most of her best friends aren't home now." She peered again at Bill, as if asking advice. "Of course, she goes to the Whitings."

"She doesn't go there so much," said Bill, a note of warning in his voice. "Not any more."

Arnold inspected the two of them, his eyebrows drawn together. What else did they know?

"I guess she got over it," said Candy, holding up a long sliver of pink ham. "Maybe she isn't there any more, Mrs. Whiting's sister, I mean." She curled the ham around her fork and popped it into her mouth, her eyes meeting her father's for a mischievous instant. "Is she?"

"Don't talk with your mouth full," snapped Arnold. (Good

God, did they all know his private affairs? Rot, how could they?) "Call up the Whitings, Bill. No, I will."

Sarah Whiting answered. Why no, she hadn't seen Frances for a long time. Arnold explained lightly that he wasn't worried, but Frances hadn't left word. Inconsiderate. That was youth for you. Well, she'd come strolling in soon, no doubt.

He went back to the table. Candy and Bill watched him, alert, silent, waiting for a cue. No use getting into a state. It was damned annoying, that was all, not to have a notion where to turn his thoughts. "Has Frances got a boy friend I don't know about?" He offered this as a joke, inviting them to share it. "A fellow with a car, perhaps? I can't imagine anyone in her senses starting off on foot an afternoon like this."

"Phil!" cried Candy, eager to help. "Phil Whiting. He uses his father's car."

"He's in college," grunted Bill.

"Maybe he came home."

"His mother would have known it, wouldn't she?" Arnold was impatient. "Use your heads. You're home more than I am, you should have some idea about your sister." (Some strange man, picked up where? In the village? She hadn't packed her things, she hadn't meant to run away. A clandestine affair. What else could it be? She'd slipped out, meaning to be home before the rest of them. An accident, on the slippery roads? A car parked in a lane, with—he'd seen them often enough, curtains tight, no sign of occupants, the whole aspect as he drove past like a leer, a bawdy wink, leave us alone, we're having us a time! But his own daughter! Why, he'd trusted her completely. At least, he had thought her interest in the other sex fortunately late in developing. What else could explain this performance?)

"The only place I know she goes," said Bill, reflectively, "is the drug store." (You see, thought Arnold. The very place for a pick-up!) "To the rental library. She lugs home books

and reads 'em all the time. But on Sundays it isn't open. Not the library part."

Arnold telephoned. Had Frances Carlton been in? The night clerk had just come on, he didn't know nobody by that name, no they didn't run the book part on Sundays.

He stared at the telephone directory. Fire! Police! Call operator. I want a policeman, my daughter has disappeared. I don't know where she went, nor how, nor with whom. His mind crackled into tabloid scare-heads. Girl vanishes. Quiet, home-loving girl, says broken father. What rot! She'd come in any moment, out of breath perhaps, knowing she was late, guilty. He'd tell her what he thought of such conduct, and for once he wouldn't attempt to be patient. Already it was dark. Suppose he started off in the car—where would he go? He felt himself hurtling along the country roads, assaulted by headlights, baffled by the darkness through which his own lights made a meagre, speeding funnel. No use in that. But when, exactly, was the moment at which anxiety was justified? He'd wait an hour. And then regret it, if he found that during that very hour something might have been done? But what? Nice thing for a young girl to set the police looking for her. Nice thing for his daughter. Her modesty, her safety, her reputation were aspects of his possession of her, and his fear took on the dark hue of outrage against his possession. He stalked into the living room, and seated himself doggedly with a magazine, a trade journal.

"You want the fire lighted?" Bill humped himself at the fireplace, drawing a match briskly across his seat. Still humped, he said, gruffly, "I could go look for Frances. She's late sometimes, only most always we know where she's late at."

"Where could you look?"

"Oh, just go along and ask folks if anybody'd seen her. Just look."

"I don't believe it's necessary," said Arnold, keeping his



"yet," to himself. "You and Candy better get your books out. I haven't seen much home work going on this weekend."

"Oh, let's look for her!" Candy took a running slide which landed her at Arnold's chair. "Noldy, let's go! It would be like a movie, driving through the night, hunting—"

"Pipe down!" said Bill. "This isn't the Royal Mounted. Go get your books and I'll let you sit on the fender by my elegant fire." His quick glance at his father as he strolled away had a flash of wise inquisitiveness. He means I haven't fooled him, thought Arnold. Good Lord, he's growing up, too.

They were quiet, the three of them, heads bent over pages. When Arnold lifted his, thinking he heard a car turn into the driveway, or a foot on the gravel, he found Candy's blue eyes intent on his face. Instantly her lids jumped to hide her stare. Now when Candy was older—but he'd expect to keep an eye on her. His imagination was weary, trying to follow Frances. He didn't know enough about her to know where to head his thoughts! Lena! Why hadn't he thought of her earlier? Frances had spent the previous day with her aunt. She might have dropped some hint. He held himself to a quiet pace out to the telephone, knowing the attention of the two children followed him shadow-close.

He hesitated, hand on the instrument, disliking to give Lena this more than inch of his private affairs. What, exactly, was the best light to throw over his story? With a grimace he called the number. No light of any color could alter the outline. Now that he had thought of his sister, however, he was increasingly sanguine. Of course she would know; Frances would have confided in her, or said, "Tomorrow I'm going to go here, or there—" The line was busy, and the signal, repeated again and again as he said, "Ring them again, operator. No one on earth could talk that long!" became the only barrier between him and the knowledge about Frances.

Then he got them. "Lena? Oh, Anne! May I speak to your

mother?" When Lena spoke, he began, violently, "Good Lord, I've been trying for an hour to get you!"

Lena laughed. "That's the children. They spend hours here when they're home, Anne and Richard, and now even Ward has a girl. Don't yours do it? Well, they will."

"I'll see they don't! Damned nuisance, when someone wants to get you."

"I'll admit that. What do you want, Arnold?"

The delay, Lena's tolerance exacerbated the bluntness of his recital. "Of course it isn't late yet," he finished, hearing Lena's Tchik, tchik! "But I am very much annoyed. I thought Frances might have spoken to you about her plans for the day."

"But, Arnold, how extraordinary! Not a bit like her. No, I haven't any idea. Frances never tells me anything. Very close-mouthed. She comes by that honestly! What time is it now? You don't know how long she's been gone? No, of course not."

"Didn't she mention anyone?" Arnold remembered that Bill and Candy were listening, but he couldn't help the angry pitch of his voice. He'd been so sure Lena would know! "She can't have gone off alone all these hours. Did she seem all right? I mean—no hint of a young man. I don't know where to look."

"I don't think she's seen anyone all winter, especially since she was sick. Just hung around the house. I've told you what I think of that!" Lena's voice came strongly over the wire, and then was silent, so long that Arnold exclaimed, "Are you still there? What's happened to you?"

"I'm thinking," said Lena. "I wonder— Did you call up the Whitings?"

"Sarah hadn't seen her."

"Where is Sarah's sister?" Lena's speech was slow, cautious.

"We did speak of her. Frances saw a good deal of her earlier. You don't suppose—"

Arnold's skin tingled, at the back of his neck, at his wrists. Lena was doling out words heavy with meaning; he knew exactly the expression of her face, a wary how-far-shall-I-go?

"What did Frances say?"

"Only that she hadn't seen her for weeks. You know a young girl sometimes— oh, I don't mean anything more than a sort of infatuation."

"Since the woman is no longer here, that can scarcely be the answer."

"Where is she?"

Good God, Frances had asked him that, too! and again he said, "How should I know? What are you driving at?"

"I was just trying to think," said Lena, mildly. "Do you want me to come out? Charles and I could drive over."

"What's the use? You can't do anything here. I'll let you know—"

He thrust the ear-piece into the hook with rigid fingers.

Fantastic, the way that woman's name kept being dragged in, and each time with a trace of innuendo. Lena was intimate with Sarah Whiting, but even so what did Sarah know? What, for that matter, was there to know? A few dinners in town, a few drinks, a little love-making, drives together. The children may have seen him waiting in the car at the end of the lane. And Sarah was down on her. "It doesn't take long to wear out your welcome if you're unhappy and poor," Adele had said bitterly, when she moved into the hotel. But what had any of this to do with Frances? She didn't know Adele's address, and if she did, why suppose that was the answer? Adele couldn't have sent for her, scheming in some devious, female way to draw him in pursuit? She'd begun that way. ("Frances is such a darling girl!" she had said, and he had answered, gravely, "With such a darling father!") She had

laughed, and before long they needed no pretext that their encounters were accidental.) What utter rot! Adele was too shrewd to repeat a used trick. Sisterly malice on Lena's part, that was all. Her way of saying, "I know what you're up to! No wonder your daughter runs away." He got to his feet, restless with exasperation. There was, he thought, no limit to the impertinence of relatives. Taking advantage of his anxiety. He was through telephoning women about Frances. In half an hour he'd call the police. He would whip up his anger into a brilliant flame between him and the dark images which tried to unroll behind his eyeballs.

"Well, your aunt Lena wasn't very helpful," he said, settling into his chair, not looking at Bill or Candy.

"Frances never tells her things," said Candy. "Even when Lena asks her. She gave her a talking to yesterday, and Frances just screwed her face up still." Arnold glanced up, to see Candy's face compressed in mimicry of Frances's resolute taciturnity that he had to smile. "I couldn't hear what it was about," finished Candy.

Probably Mrs. Barth again, thought Arnold, sardonically. Lena, inspired by gossip with Sarah Whiting, tries to pump Frances. The sharp ring of the telephone bell sent his heart clattering against his ribs, and this time he made no pretense of calmness as he bolted down the hall.

"Arnold? This is Doris Langley." The sound of her voice, its intonations so like Candace's, was a lever, prying at the bar behind which he had pushed every thought of her. "Do you know where Frances is?"

"Do you?" shouted Arnold.

"She's here. I've put her to bed. I found her when I came in this evening."

"Just what in God's name is she doing there? Do you realize I was on the point of notifying the police? She can get out of bed. I'll drive in at once and get her."

"Listen to me! She's sick. She was drenched to the skin, she's feverish, something's wrong, I don't know what. She can't go out tonight. She came here, I suppose, because she wanted her mother. You can't take her home tonight. She's in trouble—as well as sick."

"Trouble?" Arnold's shocked whisper curled along the wire, and Doris gave a little *huh*, a grim start of a laugh.

"You would think that," she said. "Not that kind of trouble. She said, 'Must you tell Father? He'll come and take me home. I don't want to go home.' That's how I guessed you didn't know she had come here."

"What does she mean? Nothing has happened here. Has she lost her mind? Or is this something you've invented?"

"I don't need to invent it. Frances is running away from something. I can't question her tonight. I'll try to get her to sleep. Be thankful that she came here, where she's safe!" Her voice was quiet, without reproach; it might have been Candace speaking. With only the voice, with nothing else of Doris there, he suddenly could not hold his hostility against her. It slipped away, globules of quicksilver he could not grasp. His muscles went lax, in the sudden great weariness of relief. Whatever accounted for the whole nightmare, with this final attack upon his pride, at least his daughter was safe tonight, not wrecked—one way or another. Some whim of adolescence— Why—he might have thrown the question at Candace, as if she stood there at his shoulder—why should he have this half guilty feeling of inadequacy because his imagination bogged down when he tried to follow the vagaries of a young girl?

"Naturally I am relieved," he said, formally. "As well as mystified. I should prefer to drive in for her tonight—but if—"

"No if, Arnold. I appreciate your conceding that." And after a moment, "I had hoped you might have an inkling—some

young man you'd forbidden her to see or something of the sort."

"Nothing of the kind!" Arnold could boom out at that. "She had no young men, for one thing. And we haven't had a disagreement, not the pettiest. You'll find it's some slight thing—"

"I hope so. I'll call tomorrow."

"I'll collect her tomorrow." Arnold spoke curtly: Doris needn't think this was more than a truce for overnight. His next day slid through his mind, composite of haste, steady pressure almost muscular in the quick succession of meetings, conferences, odd matters to settle. Running that new ammeter through the presses for the first time—"I can't make it till late afternoon. Or I can send someone for her."

"It would be wise to come yourself. Good-night."

The word wise troubled him a moment, with its minatory hint. As he jogged down the arm of the telephone the bell rang, startling him. Lena. She'd been trying and trying to reach him. Worried, had he any news? He told her, briefly. "I've no idea why she did such a crazy thing, but Doris put her straight to bed, she'd got so drenched."

"Was that all she said, Arnold? What did Frances want? I thought you and Doris—"

"I don't know. It's too late to drive in for her now. Thanks for calling. 'Night."

Whatever comments Bill and Candy had, they made to each other before he returned to the living room. "A fine piece of carelessness," he said lightly, shaking a finger at them. "Don't you fellows ever treat your poor old father that way. Send me a wire, at least." Candy jumped at him, hooped her arms about his thighs.

"I'd never treat you bad, poor ole Noldy! Anyhow, Fran isn't kidnapped or drowned—"

When, late the next afternoon, Arnold walked along a block

of old brownstone houses in the east twenties, and found beside a door a brass plate with Dr. Doris Langley, he paused a moment, snapping the gloves he carried against his wrist, frowning, savoring the extent of his irritation, before he mounted the steps and rang. For at this point the results of Frances's escapade had dimmed his concern as to her reason. That he had to drive into the city at the end of a heavy day, that he had to present himself at this door as a suppliant,—God, what a gloat for Doris!—after all the discomfort of his anxiety, intolerable, that's what it was!

A colored maid opened the door. He had to give his name, had to sit down in a waiting room. He glanced at his watch. He'd give Doris five minutes to pose as too busy to see him, and then he'd ring for the maid and demand his daughter. He'd never been here before. Doris must be making money, maid, two floors. (Or did some man pay for it?) He remembered her first set-up, a ground-floor two rooms, with a couch in the waiting room where she slept, and a party, a "shingle-hanging," Candace had called it. Candace had been very gay, proud of her young sister—and he had speculated about the male guests, which of them slept with Doris, and smiled to himself at the cool way Doris betrayed her consciousness of him, Arnold, by never letting him near her. What ages ago!

"Dr. Langley says will you come upstairs?"

Going to see him in her office, was she, to impress him? He followed the maid up the steep, winding stairs, and braced his shoulders as he passed her through the door she indicated. But the pleasant quiet room was empty. Arnold inspected it, nostrils dilating, brows meeting, with the haste of an intruder who would search out clues before the owner's presence makes such search unmannerly. Doris had done well for herself. Several good pieces of mahogany, nice Sarouk, draperies looked expensive, curious paintings above the bookshelves, modern stuff in which stiff flowers made faces at you, on the marble

mantel, with its small grate for coal, a bronze figure. He crossed to look at it, one hand plunged into his pocket. He didn't know what it was, a rough block with a hint of figures half emergent from the bronze, Adam and Eve . . . grotesque.

"Do you like it?"

He wheeled, his hand contracting into a fist. How long had she been watching?

"A G.P. gave it to me. Grateful patient. Do sit down." Doris settled into a corner of the divan, her smooth head bent as she tucked a white cuff under the sleeve of her dark jacket. "Sorry you had to wait. I had this late appointment."

"I won't keep you," said Arnold. "Is Frances ready to go?"

"She's still in bed. Her temperature is down, but—" Doris laid her hands together, fingers tight-laced; with one foot pressed hard against the rug she thrust her body well back into the cushions, her posture, the expression in her dark eyes that of impacted energy, adversary before attack.

"The drive home won't harm her. Will you tell her I am waiting?" He sat down in a chair near the fireplace, just to show that he was as restrained, as dignified as Doris, and regretted it at once, the chair being too low for an effective disposal of his long legs.

"She doesn't want to go."

"You said that yesterday. It's absurd. Why shouldn't she want to go home?" Arnold hitched himself forward, out of the forceless oblique angle which the chair gave his body. "What is it all about, anyway?"

"I've been trying to find out." (Lines deepened past the corners of her mouth, another between her brows. She looked older. The pace was telling on her! The resemblance to Candace eluded him—the lines? the way the flexible mouth moved shaping words? The tones of voice were less evocative now.) "I've an inkling. I wanted to talk with you. You ought to care why she came here."



"I had expected to ask her, I prefer to hear her own explanation."

"Frances is more important right now that anything you and I feel about each other. She ran away, didn't she? When I told her you were coming in, she cried. You wouldn't get very far with a 'What do you mean by all this?'"

"I should think she might be uneasy about meeting me, after—" Arnold rolled a fist against the palm of the other hand. "Fire ahead. I realize how pleased you must be."

"You're wrong there. Pleased because the girl is hurt? I am glad she came to me. When I saw her yesterday, I knew she'd had some kind of shock. She had all the symptoms of traumatism. I put her to bed and called you. She didn't talk, I didn't try to question her. Then Lena telephoned, to ask about her. I knew she sees something of the children, and I asked if she had any idea about an emotional mix-up. She said no, but this morning she came in, and I think I've pieced it together."

"If Lena has information, why hasn't she given it to me?"

"She wasn't sure what she had, until we talked."

"And what did you cook up between you?" Arnold rocked his foot. "Something I'm to blame for, I haven't a doubt."

"In a way, yes." Doris looked at him, her eyes shadowed with reflection and she spoke slowly, as if she tried over phrases before she selected one. "At least you didn't help matters. It has to do with Mrs. Whiting's sister, Adele Barth."

The arms of the chair creaked under the sudden angry pressure of Arnold's hands. "Why, damn Lena!" he said, with cold ferocity. "What business has she to come here—"

"Wait, Arnold. Get the whole picture. You did meet her through Frances, didn't you? I mean she turned up at the house as a friend of the child, didn't she? Sarah Whiting worried about Frances, even if you didn't. She thought something ought to be done. So she told Lena. Mrs. Barth, stalking

you, had no scruples about Frances. She took her confidence, her devotion, her love—and you must know what she was after. Mrs. Whiting told Lena she couldn't stand it, the way Frances kept telephoning, trying to see the woman, asking when she'd be back. And so Lena, with the best of intentions, talked to Frances. Cat's-paw was her word for it. She thought Frances took it well, but that, you see, was on Saturday."

"Is Frances crazy, or are you?" Arnold stared. "Are you implying that my daughter is abnormal, that she's sick for love of a woman?"

"She's sick from the discovery that she was being worked! That's hard to bear at any age, but when we're older we know at least that such treachery may exist. She's not abnormal. But this was her first attempt to set up a relationship with another person. It might have been a love affair with a boy. But lots of girls begin with this idealistic, adoring attachment to an older woman. It's not perverse, it's a step on the way. I don't know that a man can understand the innocence, the subtlety, the intensity of the feeling. It's not of the flesh at all. She had nothing to do, nothing to think about. She may have felt some doubt before Lena put it so bluntly, especially if she had seen Mrs. Barth with you. A kind of jealousy all the darker because of the difference between the delicacy of her feeling and the—well, I'll be frank—the simple grossness of yours."

"I have no feeling of any kind for the woman."

"That must have disappointed her." Doris frowned, and her next words had an undertone of pity. "Don't you see, if that's true, all the more reason why you might have considered Frances?"

"Considered her how? What kind of hairs are you trying to split? You may be used to all kinds of perversity—in your practice— But to say that Frances is jealous of me—to imply— Why, Mrs. Barth isn't that sort. She's a man's woman. The last time I saw her, she told me she was about to marry again.

Where is Frances? I'm going to stop this nonsense and take her home."

"Did you ever, in your whole life, try to understand what another human being was feeling? Perhaps you can't. But something's got to be done for Frances, and you're as much to blame as anyone. After all, you kept her at home, just when she most needs a thousand things to interest her, to show her what a full, rich thing her life might be. And then you don't see what's going on. You'd have more excuse if you cared a tinker's dam about the woman yourself!"

"Aren't you raising considerable disturbance about a trivial matter? A silly young girl, some sisterly gossip—" Arnold had put on an air of debonaire aloofness. Nothing, after all, had happened to Frances, nothing to justify the way Doris was steamed up. "What a chance to lay me out!"

"If Frances had some physical injury—a broken bone, a wound—you wouldn't call it trivial. She's really hurt worse than that—and all you can see is that I have a chance to lay you out!"

"Damn it, what can I do? Mrs. Barth is gone, and a good thing for Frances she has, if she gets into a state like this. Where is Frances? I'd like to talk with *her*." Arnold propelled himself upright with a quick harsh movement, and Doris as quickly rose to face him.

"What can you say? She's humiliated, she's frightened—she's pretty young to have her faith in appearances so shattered. Terrible doubt of appearances. Who said that? And she has some notion about you—I can't get her to say what. Some kind of *if* or *when*—if Father—I can't keep you from seeing her, of course. But I hoped I might make you see that she's up against what feels like tragedy to her, and that you're in part responsible."

"So you said. Where is she?"

Doris lifted her hands, palms toward him, a gesture of well,

go ahead, what more can I say? "This way." She preceded him to the hall, reluctance in her slow step. "It's this door." A telephone bell rang, and she moved toward an opposite door. "I told her you were coming."

Arnold had a glimpse of her office, flat-topped desk, examining table decked in white, hand grips extended, hinting at troubled human grasp. He waited, not yet opening the door beyond which lay his daughter, and heard Doris. "Yes, Doctor Langley speaking." Her voice had a different tone, resonant, confident. "Yes? That's about what we expected. No, wait until I come. Just let him sleep."

For an instant Arnold prickled with a slight shock, a layman's recognition of mystery in special knowledge. Doris Langley was a doctor, there were people who turned to her in frightened, frantic moments— Only for an instant, and then he opened the door she had indicated. The shade was drawn at the one window at the end of the narrow room, cell-wide, and Frances jerked her head up from the pillow of the small bed, a concealed hand pushing the blanket over her mouth.

"Well, Frances!" Arnold closed the door. "You certainly gave me a scare." He sat down on the edge of the bed, and felt the quick wriggle with which Frances moved toward the wall. "Did you know how alarmed I was? No hint of where you had gone." He struck a comradely tone, not too heavy with reproach. "How about coming along with me? I have the car here."

Frances twisted away, an arm flung up to conceal her face, a kind of utter collapse in the laxness of her body under the blanket.

"Why did you run away like this?" He wanted to pick her up, to rush out to the car, out to his house, back to an ordinary state of affairs. He touched her shoulder, and withdrew his hand at the shiver which started from it. "Frances, won't you

“speak to me? What is wrong? What do you want?” He heard her “Nothing,” a faint rasp under her arm. “Why not be sensible? Here I’m not reproaching you for frightening all of us, for coming here— You might at least roll over and talk to me.” She did not move.

Arnold looked at her, the delicate curve of upper arm at the elbow, the light hair flattened against the nape of the head, the quiet, volitionless mound of the body under the blanket. She wasn’t a child any more. He couldn’t reach her by anger, by a threat. She was his daughter, he could order her to come home, thus put an end to the whole preposterous affair. But as he stared, under lowered brows, her limpness, her failure to respond to him, took on meaning which was not preposterous. Arnold got up, moving quietly, and walked the narrow length of the room to the window. His fingers flicked at the cord. He’d like to run the shade clear up, let in some light. He turned, and looked about the room. The walls had a soft sheen of silver in the subdued light, the thick rug was gray, the low gray dressing table had a few silver brushes. It must be Doris’s room, he thought, impatient at its austerity because it seemed to offer evidence that she might have qualities he had denied her. Well, granted that she was right about what ailed Frances—a youthful adoration—oh, confound Lena! If she’d kept her mouth out of it, nothing would have happened. With the woman gone, Frances would have forgotten. A kind of indecency about this mixing of his daughter in his—well, not precisely a love affair . . . but he’d been ready. He could see the top of Frances’s head, the tired droop of wrist and fingers. And he could not escape their accusation. He had thought it amusing, and then thought no more about it. Good Lord, he’d been a saint so long, who could blame him if he picked up a glove tossed into his very hand, and chased the donor? Frances could blame him, now that these damned women had interfered. He set his teeth into his lip, his face twisted in rejection

of the necessity he faced. Always his technique in unpleasant matters was to slide around them, believing that given time, they dug themselves into oblivion. But he wanted Frances—with that wordless eagerness of hers to please him.

"Frances." He laid his hands on the smooth gray wood of the footboard. "Your aunt says you're troubled about—" God, how thick his tongue felt! "About Mrs. Barth." He saw the girl's hand clench, her arm bend into a taut arc. "She's gone, you know. She's marrying a man she knew in Paris. She probably will never show up again. Now what is there to act this way about?"

Frances pushed herself up, arms outstretched as levers. Under swollen lids her eyes met his with a lurking slyness at which Arnold's fingers began an uneasy tattoo. "Aren't you going to marry her?"

"Certainly not. What an absurd idea! If that's all that's troubling you—" Arnold made a breezy jest of the matter, and for a moment thought that he had won Frances to laugh with him. It looked like a laugh, the quick change in her face, but then she was scrambling out of bed, one hand tight over her mouth, shoulders hunched as she made for the door. She had it open before he reached her, and Doris was running from her office to meet her.

"Never mind!" She whisked the girl out of sight across the office, and Arnold, fidgeting in the hall, heard with some disturbance of his own interior, the harsh sounds of vomiting. Still, an upset stomach was a practical, tangible explanation of the whole mess. and the rest was female fantasy cooked up by Doris. He puffed his cheeks out, head well up, and took a step into the office. He could see into the bathroom beyond. Frances sat on a low stool, and Doris, bending over her, sponged the upturned face gently with a wet cloth. The girl's eyes were closed, and she laid her face against her aunt's blue jacket. "There, you'll feel better now." The voice had again

the echo of Candace in its low tenderness, and Arnold swung back into the hall, unaccustomed, unidentifiable misery a sudden toxic in his blood. Doris came to the door.

"You see, she ought not to talk or be talked to. Won't you wait downstairs? I'll get her back to bed."

Nothing to do but clump down the stairs. He backed against the fireplace to face the door, and waited. When, presently, Doris entered, closing the door softly after her, he burst out, "I don't like it. It's unnatural. I won't have a daughter who's one of those—"

"You'll have whatever she develops into," said Doris, coolly. "At least you'll admit she's unhappy. If we start there, we can discuss what to do for her now. If you like, you can call another doctor. She ought not to go back to the house, just to brood over this. I'd like to wring the woman's neck, but she might have done more harm, I suppose. Her very lack of interest kept the whole affair an idyll in Frances's imagination."

Arnold listened with reluctant attention. Here on her own ground Doris eluded the contemptuous category in which he wished to keep her. He wouldn't reveal to her this extraordinary mixture of humility and remorse which lay, a bitter wafer, on his tongue, filtering into secret nerve cells. If he had been less bent on his own desire, if he had for a moment given a whole thought to his daughter— Good God, he hadn't wanted her to be hurt, he'd done everything a man could for his children, hadn't he? But he couldn't for the present whip his self-esteem to its feet. "She'll be all right in a day or so, won't she?" That at least Doris, as a physician, ought to know.

"She won't go on vomiting forever, of course." Doris was curt. "But she needs help before she's all right, as you call it. Oh, I wish—" Color swept over her composed face, up to the clear line from which the dark hair grew back, and her hands

moved together, fingers gripping—"for her sake, I wish we might be better friends. She came to me, Arnold—"

"Does that alter our opinion of each other?" Arnold smiled, a deliberate provocative smile. This was better, with Doris a suppliant. "Awkward for me, Frances thrusting herself upon you like this. As soon as she is able to travel, we won't impose upon you."

"What will you do? Take her home? Leave her in that lonely house while you go about your business—and other things?" Only the timbre of her voice indicated her flinching. "She's only seventeen. Oh, I think you must do something for her! You owe her something for your part in this miserable affair. If you won't let me help, what are you going to do?"

"I don't know." He answered Doris, he answered the question growing within himself, he cried out against an unfair world. "I can't bring Candace back. That's what she needs. That's why she came here. I don't want her unhappy!"

"You're thinking of that for the first time. If you will listen to me for a minute—I'm a fair doctor, hard as it is for you to believe it. And I've had experience with young girls. In the first place, Candace's death was a terrific shock to Frances. It knocks out underpinnings before the building is ready to stand alone. Then here's a second shock. She's likely to stay a lonely, suspicious child, to grow into a woman afraid to reach out toward anyone, afraid to trust anyone, doubtful of her own power to win love or friendship. She adores you, of course, but you've kept her pretty much in submission. This is the first time she ever stood up against you, isn't it? You enjoy that, but it isn't very good for her. She has good stuff in her. She has some of Candace's quality. Why not give her a chance?"

Arnold listened, a sullen resistance blunting the edge of all that Doris said. Something morbid about such probing into feelings. All guesswork. Doris sounded glib enough, but what



did she really know? Just patter, part of the stock in trade of some of the modern medicine men. Old-fashioned ideas were good enough for him. Frances knew what was right and wrong, she'd grow up well enough. Right and wrong. What were they? He thought he knew, when it came to the children. How pigeonhole this present mess? Was it all wrong? And before he had it packed into that pigeonhole it was flowing out between his thoughts, elusive and varied as water. "A chance at what?" he asked.

"She wants to go to college," said Doris. "Just why are you opposed to that?"

"That was just an idea. She's forgotten it by now." Arnold leaned an elbow on the mantel, shifting the weight of his body. He could deal with facts like college. "She gave it up willingly, in order to run the house."

"She gave it up to please you, as you very well know. Why not let her go?"

"She also thought she wanted to be a doctor." Arnold was frankly sardonic. "Why don't I let her do that?"

"I know the answer to that one. Because you don't like me. You're pretty mediæval in your notions about women."

"So unlike most men?" Arnold smiled again.

"Frances has a good head," went on Doris, steadily. "She needs more to do than sitting there in your house. Why not let her try it a year? That won't make a doctor of her."

Arnold picked up his coat and hat from the end of the divan and deliberately, without a word, put on the coat, taking his time about the proper adjustment. He twirled his hat a moment on a forefinger, and then said, blandly, "You won't mind, I'm sure, if I ask Doctor Welch to drop in? He's had an eye on Frances all winter, and I should like to know when he thinks she might be moved." He hunted for a good phrase to cap this interminable scene. May I pay you for your professional advice? No, that was too childish. "Don't bother to

come to the door. I've taken too much of your time now." He had a moment of triumph as he stalked past her, seeing that white face of hers frozen in useless rage.

But as he settled himself into the car, he wondered what his triumph had been? Frances was still there,—he couldn't be sure which window until he found the one with drawn shade. And he brushed his hand across his face, as if his bewilderment had spun itself into old cobwebs.

He heard the clock downstairs strike twelve, and then one that night, before he slung his legs over the edge of the bed and sat up. The stiff drink he had poured for a nightcap had only accentuated his jerks and twitches. Muscles, nerves, the very cells of his brain skittering, jumping. He'd be in fine shape for the day's work! He jerked on the light, stretched into a dressing gown, and shuffled across the room. He'd go downstairs and find something to read. The night-light burned in the hall, each closed door fungus-white. Candy, and Bill, asleep, Frances gone, and behind this other door, no one. He paused there, thinking how often he had passed it, scarcely wondering whether Candace slept or lay there, listening to his feet. What had she thought about, the long hours she lay wakeful? His hand released the latch, and then closed him softly into the room. A year and more, a year and a half since she had died: months since he had opened the door. He had told himself the only thing to do was to think as little as possible about the tragedy. Put it out of mind. Go straight ahead as well as he could. As if time were something like an express train, carrying him well away from the event until he no longer need contemplate it because it lay invisible, at too great a distance. But the distance was that of days, not space, and since he had come away from the encounter with Doris, that distance had contracted into nothing. He could believe that Candace lay there in the darkness, waiting for him to speak. He groped his way to the window. Through the trees the disk of an old

half-moon glowed red-orange as it rose late. He didn't know moons ever rose this time of night. Candace would have known. He sat down on the window-seat. Just why he'd come in here—as if he might here get to the bottom of his unrest—What would he say, if Candace were there? Look here, I didn't intend to have Frances so upset. Should I be blamed for what I didn't see? A sentimental attachment like that ought to be broken up. (Like knocking down a child on a dark road, and driving away, not heeding the slight jar. But you were held responsible for that, if they traced you—a dent in a fender, a shred of cloth caught in the bumper.)

But of course, if Candace were here, none of this would have happened. Adele Barth was after a husband, a roof, a bread ticket, not a lover. Funny how Candace's death made things awkward for him, instead of leaving him free. Damned odd, though, if a man couldn't have a little fun without involving his own daughter. How could he be expected to understand what went on in a girl of that age? Doris had rubbed that in. The innocence, the intensity of feeling. Tags of her phrases persisted, for all his intention to ignore them. Innocence. It was hard to remember what that felt like. Not of the flesh at all. He groped backward toward his own beginnings. Were there from the very start two selves, a dark self that made crude jokes, that knew the words scrawled on the walls of the school privies, that knew the shame and prick of sensation; a bright self, clear-eyed, divided by infinity from the dark self, waiting to walk home from school with that girl—what was her name?—his first girl, carrying her books, buying her ice cream soda. God, was that innocence, with sex a dark kernel, a hidden fruit to be nibbled at in lofts of barns, in secret corners, and all the rest of life untroubled by it? Wasn't that all the innocence that anyone could have, the flesh from the beginning holding that dark kernel? Then later the kernel altered into ferment, into yeast, and you walked

with a girl seeking to touch her, thinking of the way her legs moved, of the way her small breasts pushed under her dress. Doris had said, "A kind of jealousy all the darker because of the difference between the delicacy of her feeling and the grossness of yours." He was gross, was he? Sex was sex, and that was all there was to it. Dress it up in fancy words if you liked. He remembered suddenly the expression on Frances's face as she said, "Aren't you going to marry her?" That sly, murky look, accusing him. It was Candace's death that left him exposed to dangers like this, leaving him no privacy, allowing the entire family indecent cognizance of his slightest impulse. Even Bill and Candy had some inkling.

He leaned back against the window sash, hands clasped about one bent knee, foot restless. It was amusing, no doubt, the kind of consternation he entertained at the idea of the three of them watching him. They were far more critical than Candace. Or were they? Was it rather that he had more responsibility for them? That he expected them to—well, to look up to him, to admire him. Admit it, he was jealous of Doris because Frances had chosen to run to her, he was hurt by the girl's reception of him. But as soon as she could come home he'd make it up to her. Take her on a little trip. For he had been careless. It was the very devil to have to consider every move, because it might in some way affect one of them.

He put out a hand, and after a moment touched the woven reeds which made the arm of the chaise longue. If he stretched his hand still farther, would it touch the Scotch rug Candace often threw over her feet as she lay there? He could feel the loose woolen fibres under his finger tips. Would she find this amusing, if she could know about it? She had known, better than the children, how to conceal whatever she thought or felt. That coldness, that remoteness of hers had separated them. He couldn't stand it. He had loved her— Why, at the be-

ginning he'd been wild about her. For months he hadn't thought of another woman. She'd been not much older than Frances, but lovelier, far lovelier. Where, all these years, had these images lain, that they could flow past in such brilliant flashes? And what tonight drove him back to these beginnings? Her eager, mobile face, under the soft dark hair—women had hair then!—the way she moved—he had been desolate all day until at night he could meet her again, and the glimpse of her as she came was a great wave lifting him, was fire, water, magic. He had felt that for no other woman. Excitement, perhaps, desire, yes—She had meant to go back to college. "I'm not sure I want to marry yet. I'm not sure you'd make a good husband. You're too handsome." Her fingers on his eyelids, moth-soft,—God, what happened to such feeling? He had persuaded her, he was ready to marry, he wanted her. And he got her. And then? He found the images less clear, sliding quickly over each other. A man and a woman wanted different things. Something notional and exigent about a woman. He hadn't actually known what ailed him until he noticed that girl in the office following him with moist, willing eyes. He'd grown a trifle weary of trying to please Candace, of finding a day-time Candace with reservations in her approval, and then with her pregnancy, a new kind of emotional absorption in which he had no part. It was too hard to fit sex into domesticity. Bait that caught a man—He hadn't meant to go far with that girl, but she thought he was pretty fine—If Candace had taken that differently—how the devil had she learned of it, anyway? He'd forgotten, if he ever knew—there wouldn't have been others. He'd been damned uncomfortable for a while, with the girl wanting more of him, and Candace shut up like ice. He'd got rid of the girl, Frances had been born, and by the time Candace was well they had slid out of the first intimacy into a new stage, with greater reserve and, Arnold had thought then, greater comfort.

He got impatiently to his feet. Enough of this mooning over the past. He could never know what had gone on in Candace's thoughts. If he had cared to know,—hadn't he, as a matter of fact, intended to avoid any such knowledge? If Candace chose to be critical, unsympathetic, intolerant, demanding more perfection than any man could furnish, he didn't care to know what she had thought. The surface was a pleasanter place to dwell. Now if Candace had made scenes, like some women—he remembered Brewer, slightly lit, talking about his wife. "Lovely li'l woman, but Jeese, can she raise hell! Take every precaution poss'ble, she always catches me. Funny thing, damned funny, Carlton, the trouble a woman'll go to make herself wild. She don't wanta be happy. Gotta find out things, and raise hell. Makes me cry, poshitively, promise never do it again, give her li'l peace offering. Cost more'n Christmas presents, wrist watch, bracelet, then she forgives me." He had fumbled through pockets for a jeweller's box, laid in against his homecoming, and found that in an excess of enthusiasm he had presented it to the current fancy. "Tha's funny, Carlton, ole man, I gave her her choice, and she musta taken both!" Arnold had laughed, and wondered why men put up with termagants. Candace had never raised hell. It took fire for hell. What was it Doris had said, along with other unforgiveable remarks the day of the funeral? "Candace was capable of a great love, and you couldn't take it." What was a great love? Any thing more than an angry woman's phrase? Love. He knew the cycle. Preliminary excitement, pursuit, a brief space of passion, and then passion dying of its own assuagement. Its end belonged to its very essence. Love was a myth contrived by women.

A kind of blankness settled over Arnold, as if he had moved in narrowing spirals until he reached a center of emptiness. Candace was dead. Too late to feel remorse for anything there. That was the nature of remorse, wasn't it, a rat crawling out

of a ruin to gnaw at your vitals? It would be strange if Candace, being dead, came to demand more than Candace alive. The emptiness seemed to be himself; he had come groping into the bottom of his mind, of his being, and found exactly nothing. He had failed Candace, hadn't he? As, in a lesser way, and for much the same reason, he had failed Frances. Candace had made her life without him, and Frances, in turn, had run away from him. Candace had not been unhappy: she had had the children. That was her great love. Could he have had more, if he had known the way? More what? He was like a mole with blind and naked snout blunted against the strange substance of life. More to it than he had guessed. Emotions of which he was not capable, experience he could not attain.

He got to his feet, his mouth dry with the taste of this unaccustomed humility, and his feet stumbled as he groped across the room. He had never pretended to be more than an ordinary fellow, a good one at business, playing fair enough—He didn't know what ailed him, trying this heavy thinking. Not his line. But at the door he paused, the glass knob cool in his tight grasp, and the quietness of the room beat like a soft pulse enclosing him. Doris had set him off like this, reminding him of Candace, pushing him back into earlier years, taunting him with carelessness about his daughter. Well, he'd see to it that nothing like that happened again. When Frances came home, he'd see what she wanted to do. *Will that satisfy you* he cried out under his breath to the beating quietness. But as he opened the door and blinked at the light in the hall, he thought, this isn't finished. I'm not sure what I mean, but it isn't finished.

A week later Arnold, Candy and Bill tucked into the front seat with him, drove along the Post Road to Riverview. Dr. Welch had suggested, in the brief interview at his office, that Frances spend a few days with her Aunt Lena. "She's nervous,

the change would be good for her. Dr. Langley is out so much she'd be lonely there. It's Easter holiday and her cousins are home."

"If she's nervous, a houseful would be the last thing she'd need, I should think." Arnold wanted her home.

"Do her good. Take her mind off herself. She's been cooped up too much this winter." He tapped his cheek with a forefinger, eyeing Arnold. "I had quite a talk with your sister-in-law."

"I suppose she took occasion to outline my defects." Arnold spoke with large indifference.

"No, she didn't." Irony in the deep crow's feet at the corners of his eyes. "Queer you two don't jibe any better. She reminds me of Candace in many ways."

Arnold made an impatient gesture of denial.

"Naturally, I don't care much for women in the profession, myself. But she seems intelligent. We talked about your daughter. Dr. Langley said she'd given you advice. I suppose more would be a waste of breath."

Arnold bridled at the doctor's sly grin. How much of the story had Doris spilled, as they discussed Frances? Welch always looked at him with that damned air of You don't fool me, my fine fellow! Arnold wanted to say, "Save your breath, don't waste it on me," but the words were rolled under, grains of sand, in a sudden wave of uncertainty. "You mean about Frances?" He couldn't show Welch the doubt, the tag-ends of humility which hung around him from last night! "Why do you all act as if I contrived to make her wretched? I want to do what's right for her! You just said you didn't approve of women as doctors! Did Doris—Dr. Langley—persuade you I should allow my daughter to cut up cadavers, to destroy everything sweet and womanly about her? Would you like it for a daughter of your own? Tell me that!"

"I don't know as I would. But I'm an old foggy, too. I don't



believe Frances really wants to be a doctor. Your sister doesn't think so. The training's too hard, too long. Hard enough for a man, and a woman has a worse time, trying to get experience, bucking up against prejudice, it takes a fighter, and Frances isn't that, by temperament."

"Frances has stamina enough!"

"I thought you were dead against it." Dr. Welch's smile for once had no irony. "You're really fond of the girl, aren't you? It's no reflection on her to see she's not one of the tough-minded. She needs to find out what she is good for. Suppose something happened to you. She ought to have a way to earn her living."

"She'd be better off financially with me dead than alive," said Arnold. "Did you think I'd neglect that? She won't need to work, nor Candy, either."

"Yes," Welch nodded. "You're sure you've fixed it. I've seen things—a doctor gets in on post mortems of more than the corpse. But I wonder, too, about the next few years. Nothing goes up forever. How long do you think you can go on expanding your factory? There's a bad time coming, as inevitable as any cycle of growth and decay. All you fellows who are making money too fast won't know what hit you."

"I'll worry about it when it happens. We used to have hard times because the crops failed. A factory doesn't depend on the weather. Modern industry has just started. New inventions, new machines, new goods made. It's not like the simple old days, Welch." Arnold laughed. "How'd we get into this, anyway? Is your idea that I should train my daughter to support me when I'm a ruined man?"

"I hadn't gone quite that far. I feel a greater uncertainty about life than you do, no doubt because of my business. If I had a child, I'd see to it he was well equipped. You know the kind of treasure the Bible talks about, that thieves and rust and moths can't monkey with. Only I'd lay it up in the

child, not in Heaven. You've stuck Frances into a backwater when she ought to be rowing upstream. Why not talk it over with her?"

Arnold rose, his habitual resistance to advice grappling clumsily with the queer uncertainty. "Your practical advice (Just the slightest accent on *practical*) for the moment is to send her to Lena's for a week? You think that will set her up?"

"Better than taking her home. A girl that age needs help to snap out of an upset. She can't just feed on herself. She hasn't content enough yet. Experience, ideas, plans. Give her something to think about, to plan ahead for."

"I'll send her," said Arnold briefly. He hadn't seen Lena. He had telephoned, saying that Frances seemed a trifle run down, dull, and could Lena conveniently put her up a week, to play around with Anne. Lena could, and for once asked no questions. Probably she'd get an earful from Doris, but what could he do?

"It'll be nice to have Frannie home again, won't it, Noldy?" Candy snuggled under his arm.

"Grand," said Arnold, absently, watching for a chance to cut past an ancient touring car that rattled ahead of him. It dashed down hills with such rocking abandon that he couldn't risk being grazed by it, and then, losing momentum, coughed and crawled up the next winding grade to the shouts of the large and noisy family it transported. "Ought to be a law," thought Arnold. Was every car in New York headed for Albany? All this talk about widening the Post Road, building parkways— There! For once a few rods of straight road and a gap in the opposing traffic coincided, and he swung past. That was progress, discomfort from one advance forcing another change. Funny men couldn't plan ahead, build roads first and then cars to run over them. If you should say, ten years from now there'll be well, how many million cars?—

could you get a road commission to listen and prepare for them? He felt rather pleased at his idea. That was the way of it, the need came first, and forced men to supply the adjustment, the change. But they moved so slowly that by the time they had adjusted to the need, there were new needs. Civilization went along in jerks, and never caught up with the needs of men.

"Only I don't see—" Candy nudged him to make him listen—"why she ran away and didn't tell us."

"Remember, you aren't to pester her with questions. She was sick, that's all."

"Musta been crazy," said Bill. "Say, Dad, there's a boy driving that car much smaller than me."

"When you're fifteen, I said."

"That's just two months. I can't grow much in two months."

"That's time enough." Arnold frowned around at Bill, who had draped himself sideways in his corner, one arm over the door, one along the seat behind Candy. His face had a bland stubbornness, and the strong spring sunlight caught in sandy fuzz along his upper lip. Need and change, thought Arnold. Did a human being develop that way, too? Bill was no doubt hunting for a new piece of evidence that he should be allowed to drive. He'd been at it for months with a dogged ingeniousness in his reasons which amused Arnold until it annoyed him. "I didn't drive till I was a good deal older than that."

"There weren't any cars then, that's why!"

Arnold laughed. "No. In that far off age, when your aged father was a boy—"

"Noldy, you aren't very old! You're quite young for a father, I think." Candy thrust her head forward to roll her eyes up at him.

"I'm getting older by the minute, being one." Bill squinted at him a moment, suspiciously, and then sank into meditation.

Spring was farther advanced here along the Hudson than at home. Forsythia gathered sunlight in its fountain branches, Judas trees spun delicate mist of rose-mauve, the hedges behind which lay stretches of lawn and distant great houses built their thick walls of new green. Arnold saw all this in unheeded flashes, at the edge of his vision, as he watched the dark road, the passing cars. He knew why Bill wanted to drive, why he postponed his consent. Sign of independence, of childhood over. Need, and then change. Discomfort, and then progress. Not much progress in the way young fellows tore about the country, no one able to keep an eye on them. He'd have to go down as far as Dyckman Street for the ferry. Talk of a bridge to span the Hudson, some day. More discomfort—the last trip he'd made over to Lena's he'd waited in line for an hour before he could crawl onto the ferry. Outlandish place to build a house, back from the Palisades in that undeveloped section of New Jersey. Of course, if ever a bridge were thrown across the river, the property would be valuable. But meanwhile Charles had endured that long trek to the University and back, street-car, ferry, street-car again. "But it's not a waste of time," he had said, mildly, when Arnold counted up the hours per week the trip would take. "If I drove myself, it would be. Now I know I'm safe from interruption, no office door, no telephone. I save up my best thinking for the trip." Comical notion, that on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, say, you would know you were going to think from Riverview to Fort Lee. He'd bet some of Charles's thinking the past few years hadn't been the highbrow kind he meant to do. You couldn't think away heavy payments on a house, no matter how brainy you were, and they hadn't allowed for so much expensive illness. At least they hadn't come down on him for money, nor had he offered any. Bad business, getting embroiled in finances of your relatives.

He dodged out of the slow queue trailing a street-car through

the narrow Yonkers street, down a slope toward the river, and past the block of his factory buildings. The grass in front of the offices was green and freshly mown, the high windows had vague hints of great presses and high benches. Well, maybe he wasn't as fine as he'd thought, some ways, here at least he was sure of himself. His hands tightened on the wheel, as if he grasped more firmly shining metal, glass, contracts, matters he understood. He might make that western trip himself.

"Noldy, will you bring me down again to watch the girls work? They go so fast!" Candy danced her fingers against his sleeve. "Faster than that!"

"Yes, some day when you aren't in school." The more money he made, the more he could do for the children, couldn't he?

Later, more than an hour later than he had planned, he drove up a sandy road and stopped at the crest to look about. "This is the road, isn't it?" Bill was sure it was. At the left the country flowed away in a long tree filled hollow, with a plain beyond, flat to the horizon. At the right, between him and the hazy line of apartment houses across the river, with an air of having been tossed off at a tangent from some distant unseen city, were several houses, each set in its half acre of tended ground, each with its recent planting of evergreens and privet hedges, with patches of weedy wilderness around them. "Well, I see a new house since we were here last." Arnold turned into a narrow road which ended bumpily in front of a stucco house with leaded casement windows, the triangular hood over the entrance door an echo of the sweep of roof line. Charles, on his knees beside the stone walk, turned his head, and then rose, dusting off his trousers, shaking down his wrinkled coat.

"Hello!" He came to meet them, stubby pipe in one hand.

"Come along in. Lena said you might drive over. I think the children have gone off somewhere."

"But I came over for Frances."

"Well, I suppose they'll be back before long."

"Isn't it a sweet little house!" exclaimed Candy. "See, there are daffodils all out!"

"I do think it looks better this spring." Charles lifted his head, his gray crest rumpled, his eyes narrowing reflectively. "We set out three firs last fall. They fill out that massed group at the left. All the shrubs stood the winter well. It takes a little time to tie your house down to the ground. I've just been putting in gladioli. You know how deep they should go?"

"Lord, no." Arnold walked beside him toward the house, his shoulders well back. Charles was taller, a trifle, but he slouched as he walked, and thrust his head forward, as if that beak and forehead weighted it. He had a relaxed air of smooth contentment, a leaf by leaf I made this place enjoyment. "I didn't know you went in for gardening."

"I find I am a true suburbanite." His light voice had an amused drawl. "In a moment I'll drag you around to exhibit the kitchen garden."

"I'm too ignorant. Show it to Bill. He's up on nature. I ought to see Lena, find out about Frances. It's quite a drive back." He hesitated. "Is Frances—is she feeling better?"

"Why, I think so. Wasn't she well? I've been reading proof all week, haven't seen much of anyone. I think she and Anne have had a good time." He opened the door and called, "Lena!" At a distance her voice sounded. "She must be in the kitchen."

Arnold brushed aside a tennis racket, a guitar, and a trowel to make room for hat and gloves on the bench in the small hall, and stepped into the living room. The room had a nondescript comfort, a slippered lack of elegance, chairs and divan sagging under the faded cretonne covers, the brown

rug scuffed into paths of lightness, music piled on the upright piano in its dull walnut case. Lena had asked Mother for that when she settled in this house. Arnold had been indignant. "You might leave Mother a few of her own possessions!" He hadn't known about it until he saw it sitting here, the day he and Candace came over to a house-warming. Was Lena furious! "You know perfectly well it's mine! They bought it for me when I was eight. I want Anne to take music lessons." Candace had intervened with praise of the fireplace, for which Charles had gathered the stones, but Lena's voice had splinters the rest of the day. "Of course we'd like new furniture to fit the house."

"You've got the house," Candace had said, "and it's nice to select furniture slowly, I think." The only thing added since then—Arnold glanced about—was that squat Italian pottery vase. Lena had carried it all the way from Italy in a hat box, and then the man who wired it for a lamp had cracked it. So it sat on a table with the cracked side against the wall. The room, for all its modernness of arched doorways and rough plastered walls was like the living room at home, its varied objects fused into a homely unity by use and passing years. The study beyond had bookshelves to the ceiling. Arnold could see the dark mosaic of the volumes. Must waste a lot of money on books. Candace had had everything she wanted in her house. He'd never grudged her a cent. Why should he remember that fragment of talk—was it on the way home from the house-warming? He had said, in light disparagement something about its being too bad that Charles, with all his brains, couldn't do more for Lena. "More what?" Candace had asked, and he had launched into details about the pinch-penny existence the Fellows family led, until the quality of Candace's inattention halted him. She hadn't asked a question, she had implied a comparison. You may think you'd prefer a highbrow like Charles, he had growled to himself, but I'd

like to see you doing housework, going around shabby— He had said nothing more. Even then—when was it, ten, fifteen years ago?—he had an automatic avoidance of anything which pointed beneath the surface of the quiet impersonality Candace usually maintained. And why, this past week, did he keep exhuming such fragments, as if his ignoring of them in the past had only buried them alive until a day of judgment? Judgment of what? Oh, Lord, where was Lena? He glared into the dining room, past the bowl of narcissus on the table, the flowers a little topheavy, with some withered stars. The door into the kitchen moved, and then banged open as Lena shoved it with a sturdy foot, and edged through with a large tray, well laden.

“Arnold! I didn’t know you were here.” She set down the tray, and brushed her fingers against her apron. “I heard Charles, but I just thought he’d found another bulb coming up.” She straightened a pile of sandwiches. “I hope I’ve made enough. I don’t know how many of the children will be here for supper. Your three, and Anne will be back, and probably Phil Whiting. Richard may bring his girl—”

“We can’t stay, Lena. I just dropped in to collect Frances. How’s she coming? Charles thought she’d gone off somewhere. Didn’t she know I was coming?”

“They’ll be here soon. Phil took them riding. Have you seen him recently?” Lena’s face kept the same expression of concern with which she had counted sandwiches. “He used to be such a nice boy, but I don’t know. There’s something— Or is it what we hear all the time about the younger generation that makes us suspicious? Sarah’s boy ought to be all right.”

“I haven’t seen him. Why, he asked Frances to the Christmas dance, didn’t he, and then she was sick—”

“Um. He took Anne. I know he’s been writing to her. But



this week he's trotted both the girls around. Anne may have asked him to include Frances, of course."

"I judge, then, that Frances has recovered." Arnold's relief at that curled at the edges with a queer disgruntlement. Here he'd been having all these uncomfortable moments, and Frances was running around—

"The first day or so she was pitiful, so sober and pale. Then she suddenly began to talk and laugh. She's almost too animated, much more so than usual." Lena looked at Arnold, the lines that bracketed her mouth deepening, restrained inquiry in her lifted eyebrows. "What are you planning to do? Just take her home?"

Arnold had a picture of Frances hurling herself hysterically after a young male. "If she and Anne are both going around with Phil, the hook-up can't be anything serious."

"That's bound to be her next phase, Arnold. Of course she's younger than Anne, but Anne does have other interests." Lena turned toward the kitchen. "I forgot I'd put on milk for cocoa!"

Arnold darted after her, catching the door as it swung. "Lord, so has Frances." He frowned at his sister's rear, apron gaping over the bulge of green wool skirt, ends of hair escaping the flat knot low on her head. "Incidentally, you might be interested—" he paused a moment, feeling decision congeal within him. He'd be damned if he'd listen to more arguments about the girl. "I'm sending Frances to school again in the fall. I needed her home this year, but Bill and Candy are learning to get along."

Lena turned her head, her eyes, the contour of her cheeks touched with quick drollery. "You are! At last!" she said. "Oh, there they are!" Outside the house an automobile horn played a tattoo, with shrieks and laughter flowing around its racket. "Do take a look at Phil's car." She led him quickly to one of the opened windows in the dining room. "Isn't it a sight?"

Arnold looked. More like a lively octopus than a car, with legs, arms, heads waving from seat and rumble. Frances knelt on the seat, braced against the folds of the top, pulling at a long leg, the boy vaulting over the side must be Phil, impossible to sort out the jerking extremities among their owners. The zigzag streaks of scarlet on hood and doors seemed to have their own motion, and the rear fenders, cut off halfway, had a rakish air of flight.

"Hell-up! I'm dying, Egypt, dying!" Frances tipped backwards, the leg stretched like elastic, up swung another, and with an incredible spring of arched body, a boy descended into the seat almost on top of her.

"Ward will break his neck sometime, doing that." Lena spoke matter of factly. "Oh, Richard's brought his girl, too. Well, I can cut more bread."

Ward, Richard, Phil, Anne, Frances, Richard's girl, and Candy running across the grass toward them, laughing with them. "Now is that everything?" Phil posed in front of them, hand on brow. "Have we lost anyone?" He cocked himself grotesquely to peer into the rear, under the car, and Frances shrieked with laughter, rocking against the door. Phil stepped close to her, shading his eyes, and in a high falsetto cried, "Why, here it is! Here's my little pet!" and jerked her away from the car. "Mustn't lean on papa's chariot. Might hurt it."

"Good Lord," said Arnold, softly, "were we ever as silly as that?"

"I don't know." Lena had started for the kitchen again. "I don't worry about them when they're acting this way. I know they're safe. It's other moods—" the door swung upon her final words.

Arnold watched them as they started toward the house, Phil and Frances weaving along in what Phil shouted was a drunken sailor's foxtrot. Bill was watching too. Arnold caught a glimpse of him at the corner of the house, his face crimson

with scorn of such behavior. Frances pulled away from Phil, just as Anne, close behind her, called out, "There's Uncle Arnold!" They look alike, thought Arnold. Carlton strain. Color, eyelids, Anne's older, more thick-skinned. Used to be a brat, probably still is. She can look out for herself. Looks sulky right now— All that in a flash before Frances saw him, there at the window. For an instant all expression left her face, so that her parted lips, her eyes narrowed in laughter, were vacant.

"See me, Noldy!" cried Candy. "See, I can do it too!" She and Ward rocked to the door.

"Hello, Frances." Arnold spoke drily. She needn't look so shocked— But just for a heart-beat had she stood there, before she laughed again, a trifle shrill, and said, "Why, Father! I didn't know you were watching! Goodness, weren't we all acting perfectly awful! I didn't know you were coming so early." There was a feverish staccato in her speech: was she play-acting, or had she caught it from Anne?

They were all coming in, now, hordes of them, Phil substituting exaggerated gestures for his louder clowning, Anne crying out, "Oh, Mother, we meant to help with the supper! *Aren't* you *sweet*, having it ready! We're starved." Charles came in, towing a reluctant but hungry Bill. He seemed as unmoved as a rock by the waves of youth which broke about the dining table. Arnold edged toward the doorway. Something appalling about modern young people; their eyes grazed you, bright-blank, their lips spoke a hasty greeting, they disposed of you to limbo. Atrocious manners. He tried to talk a moment with that girl of Richard's, Norah, pretty dark thing, reed-slender, mouth as scarlet as the ribbon tied around her hair, and she had flung up her hand to catch a sandwich as Richard bit into it, and the two whirled off in a scuffle. Good Lord, they acted as if a difference in age made him invisible, an alien, an intruder. Arnold retreated to the living

room, irritated at the dinginess with which the scene imbued him. He didn't want respect: he wasn't in his dotage, but he was used to—well, say recognition. Charles strolled after him.

"Nice bunch of kids." He felt for his pipe, glanced toward his study, and then settled into one of the hollows of the divan. "Yours are coming along, too. In years, I mean."

Arnold made a noise in his throat. Couldn't very well tell Charles that his children were half-baked, unmannerly cubs, and their friends as bad. "How's Richard getting on?" He had to say something, and the boy's voice had sounded just then above the hubbub, a duplication of Charles's in intonation and tempo.

"All right."

"Let's see, he's pulled down some honors, hasn't he?" Arnold had vague recollection of things Lena had said about her oldest son; Lena did not have this trick of understatement.

"A few." Charles's long thumb packed the bowl of his pipe. "He's in a dilemma just now. You're in business, you might have some advice. Although he's not asking for advice. He planned to study law. Now he's in love, and the years look pretty long. Some of his friends are down on Wall Street, and he thinks he could get a job in a broker's office. Lots of the smart young men are doing that and making indecent sums of money. I pointed out that I have no wealthy friends to give him commissions, but he thinks he might find—customers, I think he calls them. I don't know just what Norah is urging."

"She's a pretty little thing, but she doesn't look as if she'd wait many years for a man."

Charles got to his feet lazily as Lena crossed the hall. "Food?" he said. "How did you salvage any from that mob?" He moved the lamp to make place for the tray. "I was just

telling Arnold about Richard. I thought he might know a broker."

"I don't know any well enough to ask for a position."

Lena looked up, her tea-pot arrested at a tilt. "Richard has several openings," she said, caustically. "Charles meant you might know things about it as—as a career for a young man."

"Lots of money in it these days." Lena thought she'd caught him! "If he wants to get married, why not get to work? He's had a good deal of education."

"But he's clever enough to amount to something." Lena pushed a cup toward Charles. "If you'd tell him—" her face softened as she looked up at her husband, her exasperation thinned by strong light behind it, "tell him what you honestly think of broking, you could influence him."

"Just because I'd find it unspeakably dull— No, he can decide for himself."

"He doesn't need to get married yet. He's so young."

"Speaks the mother," drawled Charles.

"But why so dull?" Arnold reached for another sandwich. "Good food, Lena," he threw in. "Wouldn't a broker think your job dull? And making money isn't dull, ever."

"I wonder." Charles settled more deeply into the divan. "I wonder. Is that what satisfies you in your work?"

"If I weren't making money, I certainly shouldn't find much satisfaction."

"But aren't you proud of Carlton products, speedometers, whatever they are? Don't you like expanding your plant, hiring more men, improving your designs? I don't know just what you do all day, but is it just counting dollars?" Charles's lean face had sharpened, behind his keen eyes his mind stalked its quarry.

"Of course not. But money's what I'm working for, make no mistake. I like the results at the end of the year. And so do most men. Perhaps—" Arnold's smile flashed, taking the barb

from his words—"Perhaps you professors are the exception. Although you want your salary, don't you? Higher plane, but you do need to eat."

"But if someone offered me ten times as much to drop my work and say, sell bonds, I wouldn't change. What does that prove?"

"Do you know, without such an offer?"

"You better tell Arnold about some of the offers you have turned down." Lena's glance at Arnold deplored his lack of perception. "The one from that tobacco company, the—"

"No real temptation in them. Just commercial advertising schemes. But what I'm driving at—" his fingers plowed his gray crest higher—"is this. We have a sort of myth here in this country that all men want is money. Nothing else counts. It's the measure of success, it's the reason for activity. Life is pretty meagre if there's nothing to most of a man's waking hours but money at the end. The young people in college have that idea, many more of them than had ten years ago. We've been breeding a new race, a race of salesmen, with all the instincts atrophied that work used to satisfy. Oh, a few left, the least desirable, like combativeness and rivalry and egoism. High pressure salesmen, advertising men—producing nothing but talk. A bond salesman seems to me the final stage. He doesn't deal with anything as tangible as an automobile or an ice-chest or breakfast food. He sells symbols of the work of other men, he lives in a paper world."

"Good Lord, we have to have salesmen to get goods distributed, to create demand of them. How you going to finance a factory unless someone sells stock for it? Do you think the man who works all day at a factory bench, doing one operation over and over, is less—what was your word?—atrophied than a smart young salesman? Do you suppose the factory hand would work if he didn't need his wages? If he had the brains he'd be a salesman too." Arnold stopped, his

heavy brows making a dark stroke across his face. What the devil was Charles driving at? Was he one of these Socialists or Communists, making out that men ought not to have money, that they should work for the love of it or something? Hard on Lena—"We can't all be professors," he finished.

"Why, no, of course not," said Charles, and Lena coughed. "Too many of us now. I was thinking of Richard." He looked toward the dining room as he spoke, and lifted a hand in a warning gesture. Richard and Norah had just stepped into the hall; Norah stood in front of the mirror, bending forward to see her intent work with a lipstick, and Richard lounged, hand in pocket, watching her.

"Be careful, darling," shrilled Phil, popping his head around the door. "You'll just smear Dicky all up!"

"Why should that haunt *your* dreams?" Norah faced Richard. "Like it?"

"Oh, it'll do. Wait a sec—" Richard raised his voice. "I say, Dad!" He stared into the living room, with an air of reproof at discovering an audience there. "You don't want the car tonight, do you?"

"Oh, certainly not."

"How about gas? Did you have it filled up?"

"Not since you used it last night."

"I guess you have to hitch-hike home, then, old girl." Richard grinned.

"Did you want me to buy some gas?" Charles stretched a little, one hand wedging into a pocket.

"Well, it's pretty dangerous for a girl to stand on a street-corner, waiting for a lift."

"If you haven't any change, there's a dollar or so in the kitchen purse." Lena's voice was an amusing cluck of intercession. Charles held out a folded bill, and Richard pocketed it, grinning at his father.

"Saved again," he said solemnly to Norah, and the two of them vanished.

"You shouldn't tease him," Lena began. "It must humiliate him—"

"Not a bit," said Charles. "I'm the one to feel humiliation, because I neglected to have that tank filled. I find his tactics entertaining."

"But in front of Norah—"

"They all have it, a kind of grand aplomb about what they expect from us. But Richard's fairly thoughtful. He doesn't expect me to support his wife. He's developed quite a realistic streak the past year. Not about the present. His relation to us there is set. Of course we support him, send him to college, buy gas to give his girl a ride. But about next year, and what he's going to do—" Charles got to his feet and stood at a window, head thrust forward, shoulders stooped, watching the Ford shoot out of the garage. "I suppose," he said, slowly, "if a young person knew how short the period is in which his life is flexible enough to permit choice, how quickly it hardens irretrievably, he'd never dare choose. You don't know until you discover, sometime in the middle years, that you've been coming along the same road from the beginning, and you can't turn off from it. What you will do for the rest of your life is a little more of the same thing you are doing, with decreasing velocity. You can't convey that discovery to a young person. He feels no limit to time, no irrevocability about any action. It's only as you grow older that time contracts, and at some appalling moment you admit that the platitudes of preachers about the span of man's life actually apply to you. And if, at that point, you don't like the road you're on, it's too bad."

"I don't feel as old as that, yet," said Arnold. Confound the fellow, he sounded like a preacher himself! Charles could feel himself finished if he liked; he, Arnold, didn't. "What's the



good of morbid dwelling on things you can't do anything about, like old age and death? You get there soon enough."

"I don't see anything morbid," Lena burst out, "in recognizing that what our children do now decides the rest of their lives, whom they love, what Richard chooses for his work—"

"Make your bed and lie in it, or put your hand to the plow, eh?" Arnold smiled at her sharp spit in defense of Charles. "Thank the Lord they can rush into things without all this serious meditation! Fall in love and out again, try a dozen different jobs—"

"I see," said Charles, so gently, that Arnold wasn't sure just where the knife slid home, "that Arnold still retains the illusion of freedom. But you know—" he came back slowly to the divan—"I'm inclined to think it's a protective device of nature, that quality of time. Take the war generation. They weren't wise and careful because they learned too early that life didn't go on forever. Their premature knowledge wiped out all the old values. It's curious, that instead of heightening passion for life, for accomplishment, this early smell of death corrupts activity. . . . Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow—And these young folks of ours—" he lifted his head at a shriek from the dining room and the sudden metallic notes from a fox-trot record under a scratchy needle—"have the same taint, without knowing why. Here's Richard, leaning toward the barren life of a money changer, because he wants Norah, an automobile, an apartment in town,—I don't know what else."

Arnold's brows darkened, as Phil whirled into the hall, Frances tight against his chest, his cheek on her hair. "Gee, you're good!" He swung her forward, his knee bent, and twirled her around and around as the record scratched to its end.

"Is that a new step?" Arnold jumped to his feet and shouted, as he started for the hall. Frances looked at him over Phil's

shoulder, her eyes defiant. Then she twisted out of the boy's arms.

"That's the Hesitation," she said. "I just learned it."

"It didn't look its name," Arnold began, with bland mockery. But Phil interrupted him.

"The dip's the honey in that dance. You almost got it that time, Frannie. Now where's Anne? Lessee if you can do it." He darted into the dining room, yelling at Ward to wind up the phonograph. "Naw, we don't need a new needle."

"Are you about ready to go?" said Arnold, stiffly. "I'd like to get started. You might call Bill and Candy, if they can hear you above this hubbub."

"Phil said—" Frances lowered her full lids, her breath hurried—"he'd take me home later."

"I came clear over here on Sunday simply to get you!" Arnold put on his best smile, his tone cajoled her. "Are you turning me down cold?" Her resistance to him was tissue paper, he could tear it down with a lifted finger. But she didn't smile at him. She thrust up her chin, and said,

"I'll have to get my suitcase."

Arnold watched her climb the stairs, the ruffled fine hair catching light. She's just embarrassed, he thought, remembering how she acted, running away like that. All this business with Phil is just a pose.

"Are you going now?" Lena joined him in the doorway. "I suppose you should start. I was just telling Charles you have seen the light about Frances. Where are you planning to send her?"

Arnold frowned at Lena's sisterly version, but before he could bite out a good retort Charles stood beside Lena. "Have I talked you into flight? Lena can tell you it's hard to stop me, once I start." His lean, lined face had lost its expression of keen search, and his glance at Lena had an easy tolerance.

"This time, what you said was interesting, Charles." Lena

patted his arm. "I could understand most of it. And I'm not going to worry about Richard. But all this talk about the younger generation being so wild—why, it's enough to turn their heads! I don't believe in it."

The phonograph in the dining room ran down in a diminishing shriek, and members of the younger generation emerged, Candy still jerking in fox-trot rhythm. "Noldy, Ward showed me a step!" Her face glowed pink. "Oh, I had such a good time!"

"Where's Bill?" Arnold tweaked at her ear as she ended a glide against him.

Where was Bill? Oh, he'd gone out a long time ago, when they began to dance. Frances came down the stairs, and Phil intercepted her at the foot for a quick undertone, with Anne sidling around Ward. Arnold opened the front door and shouted, "Bill!" and a sleepy "Yeah!" came from the darkness followed by a sudden flashing on of headlights.

"There's your wild generation, asleep at the switch!" Arnold laughed, and fumbled through a miscellany of caps, sweaters, for his own hat and gloves. Good-bye, Aunt Lena, I've had a lovely time, good-bye, Lena, thanks for taking Frances, done her a load of good, good-bye everybody, good-bye, see you soon, good-bye....

"Well, you weren't very polite, were you?" Arnold could see Bill's face, the eyes and mouth sulky in the light thrown up from the dials.

"Aw, gee, that bunch of cut-ups!" Bill yawned. "They make me sick. I had to sleep it off."

"Just because you didn't have a chance to show off!" Frances said, as she slammed the rear door of the car. Candy giggled.

"Show off to those pin-heads?"

"That's enough." Arnold started the motor. "If you didn't appreciate the subtle flavor of their wit—" As he swung out of the lane onto the narrow country road, he thought: that

wasn't a good start with Frances. "Bill's too young and I'm too old, that's all," he called over his shoulder, but Frances made no reply.

Arnold eased himself into a comfortable position for the long drive home. Anyone who didn't believe the figures about the increase in cars being used now, to say nothing of the prophecies about the future, ought to try one of the roads near New York on a Sunday night. He enjoyed it: like war, the clash of lights, the repeated threat of disaster as the glare roared straight toward you, blinding you, and only your shrewd guess as to ditch and distance saved you; drama, too, in the way your own lights, as you rushed up a hill, took a long tangent against tree tops artificially green, tangled there with lights from an unseen approaching car, until, at the crest, the light dragged earthward, you met your adversary. There should be a better device for dimming lights, something that didn't take a man's hand from the wheel at a crucial moment. He'd talk with Moore about it, have him feel around to see if anyone was working on it.

He drove into his garage, snapped off the lights and engine, and sat for a moment, the darkness cooling his tired eyes. He could handle a car pretty well. He glanced at his wrist-watch. "Not bad," he said. "Less than three hours." He awaited commendation. Bill, climbing out, said, "All the cars were going the other way, into town, so we didn't get held up any." And Candy piped up, sleepily, "Are we home now? Why, I musta gone asleep!"

"Take your sister's suitcase, Bill." Arnold swung the garage doors into place. Couldn't they even appreciate his driving? Then Candy slid a hand into his, hers still relaxed and warm with sleep. "It's nice, sleeping in the car, Noldy. You drive so smooth I dreamed I was a bird, flying."

"You'll have to run to bed or you'll be sound asleep again." Arnold laughed at her yawn as they came into the lighted

hall. He released her hand, his own palm retaining the quality of sweet, drowsy touch, and as if his blood carried it rushing through his body, he felt his eyes smart, his heart expand in an intense diastole of tenderness. Not that he cared more for Candy than for the other two. But she had a way— She lifted her long lashes and smiled, before she started up the stairs, pulling herself by the railing one step at a time. Good Lord, he was growing sentimental as a woman. He turned into the living room, with a brief good-night to Bill and Frances. Just that things had got him down, the past week or so. Candy might almost have felt the uneasy loneliness that plagued him. Of course he was fond of them all. Unwise to care any more than he did. They grew up and acted like Frances. And yet—he hadn't planned that rush of feeling. It had seized him, stretching, warming him. Because she's little, and affectionate, and adoring. Suppose, as she grew older, she suddenly turned hostile or critical, as Frances had done. He'd have to keep a sharper eye— He stopped, caught in the implication of his thought. Ridiculous to reflect that he had to be careful about his private affairs, because they might affect the feeling his children had for him. Queer that you had to work to hold love. Perhaps as a father you couldn't have a life of your own. Take Charles—he was all of a piece, none of the impulses, the temptations of the ordinary man. Words in his blood, love affairs with heavy tomes. All of a piece, as Candace had been. Not a collection. Arnold tried to dismiss Charles with the indifferent scorn he had always held for his brother-in-law, and couldn't. There persisted from the few hours at the Fellows' house an overtone, like the prolonged and distant resonance of a bell. Arnold had ignored it while he was in the house, giving heed to sharper, nearer tones. But now he knew what it was. Assurance. Assurance in Lena, in Richard, no doubt in Anne and Ward, too, that Charles would never let them down.

That's true of me in business. Arnold walked the length of the room and stopped, hands in pockets. Men know it of me there. It had not been true for Candace. No going back over that road. What was it Charles had said, about the road you travelled? He meant a man's work, didn't he? Of course you couldn't change that, once you were established. But the rest of a man's life, his love affairs, his pleasures—if you made a botch of one, couldn't you move ahead to something else? If Frances felt now that he'd let her down, he could make amends, couldn't he? And as for Candy, and his son— Good God, he cried out against the torment of a birth-pang— Must I think always of them? What of myself? He strode back across the room, and even so his whole thought walked with him. You don't fool them, that's the point. If you let them down, they know it. For a while, until they're old enough— Suddenly Arnold threw back his head, in a great laugh. It was funny, damned funny, for a man to decide he had to reform because his children would find him out! Too bad Candace couldn't see how neatly he was caught. As he started to climb the stairs he heard a door close, and thought: If Frances is awake, tonight's a good time—

He listened a moment at her door, and then knocked lightly. "It's Father, Frances. Are you in bed?"

Silence, and then a reluctant, "No, not yet."

She was standing at the window, an old blue and white striped bathrobe buttoned to her chin, a shrunken, outgrown favorite of hers. The reading lamp made a cone of light on the pillows of the bed.

"It's good to have you home again." Arnold closed the door. "Had a pretty good time this week?" Here in her familiar child's room, with the amusing Russian effect of short bathrobe and long pajama legs, she seemed divested of any maturity, any power to sit in judgment on him. Why, she was just a child, who'd had a child's tantrum. Arnold let himself down

gingerly into a low white rocker. "Tight squeeze!" He laughed as the arms squeaked.

"Yes," she said, hurriedly. "Oh, yes, I had a wonderful time."

"Come sit down and tell me about it." Arnold waved toward the foot of the bed.

"There isn't anything to tell." Frances moved forward slowly, and perched on the farther side of the bed. "We just fooled around." Her eyes were uneasy, the tip of her tongue darted along her upper lip. She thrust out her chin in her gesture of holding back some emotion, and under the snug bathrobe the line of taut throat and high young breast was not that of a child.

She's worried, thought Arnold. Expects me to give her Jesse for lighting out that way. "What are you trying to do?" He made his voice gay, rallying. "Swipe Anne's boy friend? She had a greenish hue, it seemed to me." Let's forget it, his smile coaxed. Drop everything, just be friends again.

"Goodness, I've known Phil lots longer than Anne has!" Frances shrugged.

"I never knew that length of time counted in such matters," began Arnold, and stopped at the queer sidewise glance Frances sent him. What was going on in the girl's head, anyway, behind that apprehensive constraint? She'd got over her infatuation for that woman fast enough, if actions were to be taken as evidence. No use harking back to that. Just a feeling of awkwardness, probably, not knowing just where he stood. He had almost forgotten he had ever objected to college, so warmly did his magnanimity glow. "I didn't come in to talk about Phil, though. Nor about anyone else," he added, quickly, as her eyes widened until the irises were ringed in white; (She's terrified lest I thrash the matter over— For an instant he tasted the unpalatable tincture of shame—) "Except about you. I do want you to be happy. I've been thinking about next

fall. It was selfish of me, in a way, to want you here at home. But it takes a little time to make adjustments." He rejected a hint as to his loneliness. "Bill is almost ready for college, and Candy's older now. Would you like to go to school somewhere? Take a general course for a year or two, see how you like it?"

"But you said you weren't going to get married!" Frances cried out.

"Good God, I'm not!" Arnold bit down an exasperation at the tears which filled the girl's eyes. "I thought you wanted to go to college. I'm not trying to get rid of you."

"But Candy isn't very old yet." Frances rubbed at her eyes with the back of a fist. Her voice had a hesitant apathy.

"The first question is, do you want to go?" Arnold tried to shift his cramped legs, and the little rocker groaned. "We can meet objections later. I'm not forcing you into it. You've certainly given everyone the impression that you wanted nothing else so much, and that I—" He broke off again, as color flamed in the girl's face. He didn't mean to be impatient, but he had expected some enthusiasm.

"I had stopped thinking about it," said Frances, in a small voice.

"Well—" Arnold smiled at her. "Now begin again." He had been too abrupt, perhaps; she couldn't swing so suddenly into a new wind. "If you could find a place not too far away, you might come home weekends." He'd do the thing wholeheartedly, now he was launched, break through that listlessness—"Your Uncle Charles could help you get in— We might even take an apartment in town for the winter. There's my girl! You begin to look half alive." He pried himself out of the chair and crossed to the foot of the bed. Frances looked up at him, her mouth buttoned between her teeth, tears bright in her eyes. "You would like it?" She nodded. Arnold bent to kiss the ruffled soft hair, and she flung her arms about his neck,



her wet eyelashes brushing his cheek. "There, it's all right." He had to clear his throat. For a moment she was a child, clinging desperately to reinstate him. Then she let her arms drop, her hands closing over the painted rail of the bed, her face flushed, a cautious reticence in her puckered brow and grave mouth.

"You think we could manage?" she asked, and took a long breath. Arnold thought so. They'd make proper inquiries at once. "It's such a surprise." She sighed. "I'm not used to it yet."

"Sleep on it, then." Arnold started toward the door.

"Father!" Frances raised her voice. "Why did you change your mind?"

Arnold turned, and for a moment their eyes met. She knows, thought Arnold, that it's a bribe to win her back. Not a bribe. Amends. I can't say that. "Perhaps—" under his dark brows his eyes held hers steadily—"just to show you I really mean well as a father." His smile was deprecatory. "Shall we let it go at that?" For a moment embarrassment prickled in his finger-tips and temples, as the girl's face altered, a rush of feeling threatening the thin barrier of reticence. "Good-night," Arnold said, hastily. "Let's say nothing about what's over and done with. Tomorrow I hope you'll have some enthusiasm about next year."

With that he went quickly away. There were limits to what could be said between father and daughter. Limits to the degree of intimacy possible. As he found the wall button for lights in his room, and closed the door, he shrugged. He'd done his level best, and then had to run away. Perhaps Frances hadn't meant to say anything. She had lost her hostility to him, at least. Hadn't that been in part embarrassment like his own, at the unfortunate mix-up? He certainly couldn't say to her, "Look here, I'm sorry you got messed up with a woman I was after." He couldn't say to her, "What about

this boy Phil? He's damned fresh— What do you do?" He ought to be relieved that she had moved on so quickly from an unhealthy infatuation for a woman to a regular affair. But he wasn't. He wanted to keep her a little girl. Nice sentimental attitude. Glad he'd decided on college. He saw what Welch meant, about giving her more to think about. Arnold slipped off his coat, ground back his shoulders in a great stretch. God, he was tired. If his mind could only stop nagging him! He was doing the best he could. For an instant he stood, head turned slightly as if he listened, and his weariness mounted into a profound and inarticulate dissatisfaction. If he could listen sharply, could bear to look more closely into that black mood— But he shrugged again, and bent to untie his shoelaces. What did he have on the decks for the morning? High time he got back to something useful.

# *Book III*



## Book III

### I.

**B**ILL lay flat on his back, the swamp grass crackling at his ears. Overhead, under low cumulus clouds, sea-gulls rode the wind; they flung themselves into it with strong beat of wings, and came sweeping back, wings poised like sails. Storm coming. They played this game always, like boys climbing a hill to coast back. The older birds flashed, white silver, under the gray sky; the younger gulls, feathers still dull, disappeared against the clouds, their mewing distant and high. They must do this because they liked it. No food as object here. Maybe it was a sort of training school in flight. Weren't there always young ones? A drop struck Bill's nose, and he sat up with an easy swing of his body. Time he was getting back. The south-east wind had stirred the incoming tide into small breakers, the brittle grass of the salt marsh moved in waves of color, like seeing the wind, those shifting tones of green, cut by the dark straight lines of ditches. He'd get a soaking before he reached the subway.

He slipped a rucksack over his shoulder, and stood up, shaking down his trousers, peering to see how much leg showed through the three-cornered jag below the knee. He'd fixed his pants all right, crawling through that pile of brush. But he'd found the nest. One hand caressed his seat gingerly. That tear didn't show much, he guessed. He slid up the zipper of his streaked leather jacket, and set off in an even, sure-footed swing across the point toward the mainland. He'd had a good day, getting away from the apartment before anyone

woke up to ask where he was going. If he could get back in as easily! Place'd probably be lousy with people, Frances's young men, Candy's squealing crew, and Dad, saying, "Where have you wasted today, looking like a tramp?"

It didn't matter. His present well-being flowed over the moment of prophecy. An overcast Sunday with a threat of storm was the best. Kept family picnics at home, discouraged petting parties and boy scouts. He'd had the place about to himself all day. Kept the birds quieter, of course. But even in sunshine they wouldn't sing much just now. Too busy. The migrants had all travelled farther north, and the natives had settled down to family business. He'd like to get into the woods near home. Funny the difference those few miles inland and north made. In a few weeks they ought to be moving out, although Dad had been grumpy as the devil when Bill referred to the summer.

Bill jumped a ditch, pushed through the brush that edged the sea-swamp, and quickened his walk to a lope as he struck an old road, the blocks of cement heaved and broken. Remnants of such roads all over the place. Some bright fellow must once have planned to ruin it, running roads, selling lots, putting a rabble of people in cheap little houses where quail and rabbits and meadow larks owned the earth. Luckily his scheme had failed. Bill had found a cellar hole or two, an old hydrant. It didn't take frost and weeds long to destroy most of the presumptuous work, to return the place to its real inhabitants. Lucky for Bill that business venture had failed. If he hadn't found this place, the year would have driven him plain crazy. "You can't go back and moon around the house," his father had said. "I want you to get used to New York, to buckle down to your work. You need to form new habits, it's very well for a kid to fool around in the woods, but you're growing up."

Bill turned up the collar of his jacket as rain slid down his

neck. Men came running in a black swarm from the old pier where they had fished, making for the shelter of trees or battered cars. He liked the hard cold drops on forehead and eyelids; he ran easily, rucksack thumping his back, water sliding down his bare head. He'd like it if all business adventures went the way of this one. Sea weeds and frost breaking up Fifth Avenue, wild animals roaming Broadway—even cities didn't last, he'd read about them. Babylon and Tyre and Nineveh. Trouble was, New York would outlast him. He scooted over the drawbridge at the Hutchinson inlet just as a tug whistled, and stopped to watch the leisurely process as she poked her blunt nose along the narrow channel and puffed through, triumphant as a duck, drawing dredging barges after her. Then he shook himself, rain flying, and ran on toward the distant subway station. The rain darkened his hair and beat the color from his face. He had grown taller, and his shoulders had not yet broadened for his height, so that his man's body seemed to taper into boy-top. His face had begun to lengthen, and under the rain the bones of skull and jaw showed strong.

He stood in the vestibule of the car, wet trousers clinging to his shanks, toes curling inside soaked sneakers. His heart, pumping steadily from his run, warmed him, and he leaned contentedly against the door, taking the swing of the car in flexed muscles. Well, his father must be right, and he was a lazy tramp. "No use sending you to college, you don't care enough about books," he had said, when Bill had, after wasting a summer with a tutor, squeezed through high school. "What do you want to do?" Bill knew very well what Arnold thought of the way he spent his time. It was childish. "Expect to make a living counting bird's eggs? God, Bill, it's time you grew up. Here's the factory, most men's sons would jump at a chance to learn such a business—" It had been Arnold who decided that a good business course was the thing, and Bill

took it. He would have bitten his tongue through before trying to explain the way he felt about that or anything else. Something wrong with him. All right. He'd plod along with problems of accounting or psychology of advertising or industrial development, and when he had a chance he'd sneak off. And at the end of a day like this—he stared into the car, at the dull faces of the few passengers, a girl with black curls and painted mouth chewing gum rhythmically, the youth beside her picking thoughtfully at a pimple on his chin. . . . He couldn't explain to anybody why, for instance, he had to come back to listen again for that new bird note he had heard three times and had not yet identified. A fellow wanted to do that, or he didn't, that was all. Maybe he was a freak. He had not yet put into words his inner knowledge that life in any form was the one thing which satisfied him, that he had patience and curiosity and an excitement at any discovery, however minute, that even now, at nineteen, he moved gropingly toward a fulfilment of himself as an explorer of those things in the world which had life. Never could he find contentment in the occupations with which most men fill their days, occupations which are a means to a livelihood. . . . If he could learn enough to get some kind of job, he thought, he would save his money. It wouldn't take an awful lot to make a proper nest-egg. Then he'd start off— He'd like to go to South America, to locate some of the migrants. Nobody knew much about migration. He'd like— Gee, here was the station and he'd almost missed it! He caught the rubber edge of the door as it swung shut and wedged himself out.

The rain had driven Sunday strollers from the streets, cars, honking in irritable haste, went splashing homeward. Bill scudded along, wind and rain behind him, the few blocks to the Drive, around the corner into the lee of the tall apartment house. Jeeze, he hated the place. No privacy. Somebody ogling you every time you stirred. He shook himself, rubbed



a wet sleeve over a wet face, and pushed at the heavy door. Sure enough, from within the doorman in his braided monkey jacket and white gloves laid a hand on the door. He dropped it quickly enough when he saw to whom he had offered service. "Well, well, did you fall overboard?"

"No, I jumped in." Bill sloshed across the hall and held a thumb on the elevator button. Wise-cracking ass! Smirking and running around like a beetle when he smelled a tip. He could hear the shrill signal grow louder, until the door he faced (metal, with imitation graining) popped open and the elevator boy thrust out his head.

"Wha's the matter? A fire? You oughta know I can't come any faster than I come. Punching that bell—"

"Did the button stick?" Bill flicked his thumb nail at it. "You were asleep between floors." He stomped into the car, shaking it.

"Your sister was asking me had I seen you." The boy jerked the lever. "And did I notice where you looked as if you were going?"

"Which sister? Frances? What'd she want?" Just what he said. No privacy. He'd tell Frances he thought it pretty cheap to discuss things with the elevator man!

"I can't imagine. She musta noticed you weren't around. I told her I wasn't no Master Mind, but I didn't think from your looks you were going to church."

"You didn't see me this morning!" Bill's ears burned with rage. Frances might know these fellows snooped into family affairs and now they'd think he was treated like a baby instead of showing him respect—

"I guessed right, didn't I?" The boy grinned, pleased that he had won this round of their continuous sparring match. "What you need is a wringer." He stopped the car, some inches too high, jerked down too far, overshot the proper

level again, all to the accompaniment of helpful groans from Bill.

"Talk about your roller coasters! Let me out, will you? What you need is—" He didn't finish, for the boy slid back the door, and there in the hallway, buzzing with final chatter, stood most of the family. They would! When he'd planned to use the service door— His cousin Richard, with Norah, his father, Frances—only four, after all, but four times the nothing he'd hoped for was a crowd. Norah saw him first, and said, "Here's Bill!"

Father's eyebrows made the heavy fringe under which his expression lurked; they all looked solemn. Bill made a noise composed of a collection of consonants, Hrrhr, intended to be How are you and How do you do and Hello. Richard nodded, scarcely looking at him, and touched Norah's arm. "Come on," he said. "You said we had to go to that damned party." Frances glanced at him, without a word about his lateness or his wetness, and Bill, edging around them, lunging toward the apartment door, decided their long faces had nothing to do with him.

That was fine. He whistled as he wriggled out of saturated clothing, draping jacket and trousers over chairs, inspecting the queer patterns of blue and red and saffron left on legs and wrists and back. Guess it would rub off. He opened the door, listened, and sprinted for the bathroom. He was towelling himself with gusto when Frances spoke. "You in there, Bill?"

"None other," he said.

"I hope you're getting into some dry clothes."

"If you give me a chance. Watch out." He opened the door a crack. "Not a snitch of a stitch to cover an itch—"

"Bill!" But she didn't sound really cross. Some ways she was a good scout. "I saved some supper for you." She walked slowly away, Bill watching until he could bolt for his room.

They'd been talking over something serious, he could tell by the way she moved, not lifting her feet. If it wasn't him, it was money, he'd bet. Richard and Father had been pretty chummy since last summer. Bill stretched, yawning, and dressed. He'd got pretty sick, in case anybody wanted to know, which they didn't, of having Richard held up as a model. "He shows you how far a young man can go in these days," Dad would say. "Ask him about your work. He can advise you better than I. Right down on Wall Street, in the heart of things." Ask him nothing. If he told you the time of day you'd think he invented clocks. Honest, he knew more than God about what was going on, and the way Dad listened to him—gah! Bill slapped a brush hastily over his damp hair. They'd gone, and he wouldn't have to lurk around with that kind of swollen awkwardness they made him feel. Not that Norah knew he was on earth. But it didn't make a fellow exactly comfortable, having to listen to her play up to Father, and take little digs at Richard. He knotted a stringy tie, and inserted himself with a moment of wild arms into a knitted pull-over. Kinda snug. He yanked it down in front, tried to pull a fraying cuff over the protruding shirt sleeve, and opened the door. There he listened a moment, a trick held over from childhood, as if, emerging from solitude, he entered enemy territory, and must reconnoiter to know what foe he was about to meet.

An apartment left so few ways of escape, even one as big as this. Bill disliked it the minute he first saw it, and the months since then—three falls, winters, springs,—had only strengthened the sinews of his dislike. "It's a piece of luck, finding it," Father had said. "Good location, look at that view! Well furnished, I've forgotten the decorator's name, but the woman said it was all done over last year. Room for all of us. It's not a bargain, but it fills the bill."

Bill had suppressed several cracks he thought of, as being

not very good puns. The furniture didn't bother him. But no matter who came, or what happened, he couldn't get out without first passing the barrage of elevator and door men, and when he got out, where was he? Nowhere, and nothing to do. The essence of home for Bill was that the house, as an occasional shelter, a roof under which to sleep, rested flat upon the earth, you stepped from a door upon living earth, not upon sterile pavement, you were awaited by countless things—tasks unfinished, spectacles unseen, special, secret spots to revisit.

Today there seemed nothing threatening him, no possible invasion of his purpose, which, at the moment, was only to find the supper Frances had left for him. Frances and Dad were in the living room, Frances with her nose in a book, Dad in the wing-chair, invisible except for a jigging foot and smoke from his cigar, which floated in long lines of white until the onyx and brass lamp beside him sucked the lines under the huge rose shade. Bill crossed the lobby stealthily, ducked through the dining room, and made the kitchen. There in the solitude of porcelain and paint shining white, he ate enormously and contentedly, first all Frances had left on a tray, next the results of a foraging in the refrigerator, and finally three bananas which he had overlooked in his first search of the vegetable cupboard. He'd like some of those sausages, but probably Hulda meant 'em for breakfast, and she made awful rows about food. Regretfully, the taste of them on his tongue, he closed the door. He hadn't even made his belt snug!

He jumped as the kitchen door flew open. Hulda, home from her Sunday movie, her gay figured silk in taut bulges over arms, breasts, hips, her white shoes squeaking under her weight. "Been eating me out of house and home, have you?" she giped at him, as she hung her damp coat behind the door and stood her umbrella in the sink. "Did you make out? I saved some chicken when you didn't get back this noon."

"No! Where is it?" Hulda's laugh rocked her bosom, and Bill roared with her. "You never hid it so I couldn't find it!"

"For once. And you needn't look or I won't get it." Guarding her secret with broad rear, she rattled dishes in the refrigerator. As she set the platter in front of Bill, she said, "It was good, too. What with Frances afraid she'll get stout, and your father scarcely touching a crumb, it might have been anything. I wish you'd stay home for Sunday dinner."

"Tastes better now." Bill's white teeth stripped the drumstick. "Have to work up an appetite, don't I?"

"Heaven help us if you ever did!" Hulda shook her umbrella to see if it had dripped enough. "Don't eat the bones! There's a wing—"

Bill poked a finger inside his belt. "You know—" he grinned at her—"it's tight. I hate to stop—"

"You must of started some time ago." Hulda set away the platter. "I hope when we get back home you'll eat at meal time." She slammed the refrigerator door. "Has your father said anything about when we're going?" Her florid face lengthened. "It's late. Last year I had the house all open before the first of June, and a girl hired. He hasn't said a word this year."

Bill dribbled water over greasy fingers. "No." He looked at Hulda. He didn't exactly discuss things with Hulda, but she had, without words, a barometric accuracy in her reflection of domestic weather. Now she was worried. "Maybe it's Frances," he said. "We have to wait till she graduates."

"Maybe it isn't. I don't like what's in the air." Hulda shook her head. "Every day you hear some more. People losing all their money, no jobs anywhere. Your father's a smart man, but he's worked up till he don't eat or sleep. I hear him nights. I don't mind him snapping at me—" Hulda's sandy eyebrows drew together, making a queer white bulge in the high color of her face. "But I'd like to know where we're at."

"But, Hulda! We'd always have the house." Bill felt a momentary discomfort churn the wrong way in his inner workings. "I'll ask him when we're going back."

"Ask him, then. It isn't my place to ask. But I'd like to know. I saw Mollie today. She called me up, and I met her. She wants to come back." Hulda's expression added to its anxiety a smack of "I told you so." "Her husband's lost his job. I told her two years ago they ought to lay by something, and would she listen? Harry had driven the Stovers for ten years, they'd do anything for him, Harry wanted her to look pretty and never do another lick of work."

"Harry was a swell chauffeur." Bill remembered him driving up to call on Mollie, in an amazing succession of cars, station wagons, Rolls Royce, imported roadster, whatever he happened to have in use.

"Much good that does him now, with the Stovers wiped out. Lost everything, Mollie says, and nobody else is hiring shuffers. She was a good modest girl before Harry turned her head, and I told her I'd see."

"Did they lose that big place, too?" Bill had seen its stone towers through trees, overlooking the Hudson. "Well, that's different." He took on a gruff, masculine tone, addressing both Hulda and the qualm in his own stomach. "Stover was on Wall Street, and that's where the trouble all was. Father's got a factory. That's different." He tried to recall some impressive phrase from lectures to which he had given unwilling attention throughout the year, but nothing seemed to fit. "Cheer up, you old scarehead," he ended. "I'll ask Dad when we're moving out."

"A lot of worry about anything," Hulda threw after him. "If you found a wolf on your doorstep you'd drag him inside and eat him!"

Bill thumbed his nose at her, and headed for the living room. His speed diminished as he neared the doorway. His

father was still concealed by the high back of the chair, and Frances stood at the windows, looking out, one knee on the long seat beneath them; the wide panes of glass seemed to ripple and move as light struck the rain which beat against them. Bill moved forward tentatively, and his father turned his head. Bill wished he could get over the confounded feeling of wagging his tail when his father looked at him. Almost feel it move. Funny, when he wanted his father to pat him on the head with a kind word, he had to do things like skipping off this morning. But now Arnold's glance grazed him incuriously, went past him to Frances.

"Where is Candy?" he asked. "It's no kind of night for her to be out."

Bill hunched his shoulders, reached for a section of the Sunday paper and retreated behind it, sliding down well on the small of his back on the glazed chintz-covered chair. He didn't know as he better say anything, after all. That tone of Dad's!

"She's all right, Father. They'll drive her home."

"Who will?"

"I told you, don't you remember?" Frances swung around to sit on her foot. "The Bagsters sent their car." She humored him, explaining again. "Several of the girls were going to this dance recital, one of the old girls from Candy's school. It didn't begin till almost nine."

"Oh, yes. Yes." And after a moment, "She's too young to run around all the time as she does. She's somewhere every night."

"There've been lots of things lately, but they're almost over. End of the year parties and everything. When we get to the country she'll settle down."

Bill peered over the edge of the paper at Frances. Go ahead, his thought urged her. Ask him. When do we go? Fleetinglly he considered Candy. She used to stick to his heels, close as a

tick, yelling after him if he got out of sight. Of course first, ages ago, it had been the three of them together. Four, before Mother died. Then three. Even before they moved into town Frances had withdrawn from the trio, that winter she was sick and ran away. Then she'd gone to college and hadn't even lived at home except Sundays. Of course she was awfully serious and grown-up. But Candy—when had she begun to put on airs, letting her skirts down, curling up the ends of her hair, afraid to get her shoes muddy—why, last summer he'd caught her pretending to be afraid of a garter snake! Showing off for that boy. That had about finished him! When he'd exploded about it, she'd rolled her eyes and said, "But I am afraid now, honest, Bill!" And Wesley had said, "Of course she is, you mug. She's a girl, isn't she?" She'd been just a nuisance tagging him everywhere. But he'd thought she cared about— Clothes, that was all! Parties, boys. He'd caught her swiping Frances's lipstick and cigarettes. If Dad knew all he knew— That was the way women were. He was glad he'd found it out. He could go alone. Cat that walked alone. No, the Lone Wolf. They needn't think she'd settle down this summer. She'd had a crowd of silly kids— But in the country he could get away from them all. Why didn't Frances say it, when can we go?

Arnold had settled back in his chair, legs crossed, one foot wiggling, chin on a doubled fist, which hid his mouth and pushed his cheek into folds. His eyebrows bristled, a lock of dark hair fell over his brow. Bill saw, with a queer click in his head, that it left the temple high and bare. Was his father getting bald? getting old? And then Frances did speak.

"I suppose Hulda and I should go out to the house some day soon. We sent so many things to be cleaned last fall, rugs and curtains, it will take longer to open. I'll be free this week. The next week, with Commencement—"



Arnold let his hand fall, and sat forward in his chair, shoulders stooped.

"I've been putting off speaking of it," he said, and at his flat, dry tone Bill crackled the newspaper against his stomach. "This is as good a time as any. I've got to rent the house. I'd sell it, but no one's buying anything. Brown, the Yonkers agent, has found a tenant. A family reduced to what seems poverty to them. They can afford our humble home. And we—For God's sake, Bill, don't look like that! You don't think I'm enjoying this, do you?"

Bill heard the paper tear under his horrified hands. He didn't know how he was looking, but he ducked his head and squinted.

"You may have heard in your enthusiastic pursuit of a business career that there was a crash last fall? That the bottom has dropped out from under? Or maybe you agree with Mr. Hoover, that we have passed the worst and with united effort we shall rapidly recover." Arnold flung up a hand, and then was silent, watching it, as if the violent tremor of the fingers fascinated him. Bill cast an anguished look at his sister.

Frances placed both feet squarely on the floor, her hands outspread on the seat. "Is it as bad as that, Father? You haven't told us—" She held her chin high, and for a moment her face lost its grave maturity, in the wide fright of her eyes. "You've seemed so busy—I thought—"

Arnold pushed his hands hard against his knee to steady it. "Busy? Doing what? Did you ever see an ant hill after someone steps into it? That's what it's amounted to, all the mad tearing around we've done. I thought I'd pull out of it. I don't want to close the factory. I can't get any money. That's simple, isn't it? Orders cancelled, no payments for those delivered, cash demanded for material. . . . Yesterday the Whit-sun Motor Company failed. I'd shipped an order early in the

week, the best of the year, and while it was on wheels, they failed. Richard tells me today that probably the bank won't open tomorrow. My bank. Richard's stripped bare. I can't help him. I didn't intend to say all this." His long body gave an angry lurch, and he pounded his fist against the chair. "Dear Lord, I've done the best I can. When you look as if I'd hit you across the face—"

"Father, listen!" Frances moved quickly across to his chair, with a little glance of warning at Bill. "We were just surprised. It's all right. If you can rent the house, that's fine. Isn't it, Bill?"

Bill strangled faintly.

"We can manage. Everybody says this can't last forever. We can stay right here."

"That's it." Arnold spoke more quietly. "I have to pay for this place until fall. It's no place for summer, but what am I to do?"

"Poor father, not telling us a thing!" Frances touched his shoulder. "I've been holding something back, too. I didn't know how you'd like it." Crimson, dumb, Bill heard them through a confused roar of protest in his blood. Stay here? *Here!* "I've been trying to get courage to ask you. Professor Rogers asked me if I wanted to work for him this summer. Reader for his courses, and help on some text he's editing. He can't pay much, but it's a start. It's an honor, his asking me. But I thought after I'd had four years, you might not like it, this summer. If we stay in town, though—"

Bill jumped at his father's laugh. "It's come true. God, it's a shame old Welch is dead. He ought to know."

"Know what?" Frances was standing as tall as she could, her round, soft figure taut. "It isn't funny, Father. Rogers is one of the biggest men in his field, and just to say I've been his assistant—"

"Welch got after me about you, years back. To send you

to college. He said—or did I say it?—that some day you might be supporting me.”

“It will be a long time before I can support anybody, even me. But so many of the girls haven’t found any work at all. Oh, Father, it would be wonderful!”

“You don’t even mind giving up the house, do you?” Arnold looked at her, his eyes brilliant slits under his brows.

“I didn’t mean that!”

“I suppose not. Take your wonderful job. You may really need it before I reach the end. Perhaps Bill has something up his sleeve, too, and all my devilish struggle to keep things going has been a delusion.”

Bill flinched as his father rounded on him with a face drawn in a queer ironic grimace. Was Frances crazy, boasting about what she could do in the face of utter calamity? She seemed a traitor, betraying all of them, their life, their past, all that mattered. Bill ground his fists into his pockets. If he didn’t watch out he’d begin to blubber.

“Have you?” insisted his father. “What great boon does—”

“Father, please!” Frances’s voice had little quavers. “I was so proud because I could finally do something. I won’t do it. And poor Bill—he feels worst of all of us. He just lives till he can get back home.”

Bill ground his teeth and shut his eyes tight. This was worse, the inclusive tenderness with which Frances lifted her hands, the way his father suddenly slumped back in his chair.

“I’m sorry,” he was saying. “I—I’m sorry. I don’t need to be a brute.”

“You aren’t! You’re just tired out. My gracious, we’re comfortable here. Just one summer! That’s nothing to feel so terrible about. Bill can find something to do, can’t you, Bill?” She turned to look at her brother, her eyes soft with pity.

She did care, then. Bill floundered; every plan, every antic-

ipated hour of the long summer turned to a stone hurled at him, knocking him bruised into a wallow of misery. Frances cared a little, but less, because she had something else to think about. And he—"Oh, sure!" he shrilled. "I'll find something."

"I could make a place for you at the factory," said his father, slowly. "But I'm carrying men now with nothing for them to do. If you could find yourself a job—if there is one to find." He checked himself, as if he had started on a familiar track of advice to his son, and found the track blocked, washed out in a cloudburst of doubt. "It won't hurt you to try," he ended. "If things get worse, I can't do much more for you." He pushed himself up to his feet, wearily. "It's understood, then. We stay here. If the house isn't in order, would you see to things? They want it the fifteenth. And tell Candy, if she ever comes home. I'm going to bed." He left them, walking slowly, with a queer shambling Bill had never noticed, as if his nervous energy had centered in his tired drooping head, leaving nothing of his usual crisp coordination. When he had gone, Bill glared at his sister.

"If you'd said you didn't like it, instead of being pleased—" he began, all his feeling clumsily hunting an outlet.

"Don't pick on me!" Frances was gathering the scattered sheets of paper, folding them with quick, nervous movements. "Don't you see how dreadful he feels? We can't bother him. You needn't think I like having strangers there in our house!" She dashed a hand against her eyelids.

"But you said it would be wonderful, this darned job—"

"Well, it will." Frances blinked. "Didn't you ever have two feelings at once? Honestly, Bill, if you'd find something you want to do, you'd be better off. You haven't done a thing in college this year. And now you're wild because you can't loaf all summer."

"Oh, Jeeze, leave me alone, can't you?" Bill set his lips

together, cheeks puffing with inner explosion, and tramped out of the room. He muttered to himself as he tore off his clothes and flung himself into bed, to lie with face crushed against the crook of an arm. Once he lifted his head, at the light cadence of voices. Candy was home, then, and Frances was telling her. She wouldn't care. No one cared except him. And he . . . what he had lost. . . . He wouldn't think about it. He wouldn't look at the images that shifted across his eyelids . . . wouldn't feel moss under his feet, hear—

He was surprised when Hulda woke him, rattling his door-knob, calling, "If you don't get a hustle on, I won't save you any cakes." Then he sat on the edge of the bed in a blankness that ached, before he remembered the reason. He didn't want any breakfast. If he couldn't eat, he guessed they'd know how he felt. But Father had gone, and Frances, and Candy was still asleep. Just as his body had put him to sleep, so it ate. When he had finished, he spent some time polishing his shoes, brushing his coat, trying on first a soft gray hat of his father's, which bent his ears, and then a cap. He ran a finger across his chin, and decided regretfully that he didn't need a shave. He practiced expressions, fierceness, determination, grimness. His face was still screwed into his conception of the last when, emerging into the hall, he met Candy, scuffling along in mules and flapping cretonne pajamas.

"Oh, Bill!" She tucked her hand under his arm. "Goody! I thought every buddy had gone. Come and sit by me while I eat breakfast." She smiled her most special smile.

"Can't." Bill pulled away from the tug she gave his arm. "Got a lotta things to see to." She was a cute kid, and when she looked at you like that you'd almost believe you were the one person in the world she ever gave a thought to. Maybe she wasn't exactly pretty; you didn't notice how she looked so much as how she felt. "Aren't you late for school?"

"Please, Bill! Just a few minutes. I haven't seen you for

days. What you going to do? Couldn't I go with you? This week's exams and I don't have any till tomorrow. I thought maybe we could do something, the way we used to." She tipped her head on one side, her lashes curled up from ingenuous, deep blue eyes, her soft mouth was wistful.

"Say, what's eating you?" asked Bill, crudely. "The reason you don't see me is because you're gadding all the time. What you want?"

Candy slipped one foot out of its mule and hooked her fingers around a slim bare ankle, poised storklike. "I just wanted to see you."

"What for? I got things to see to."

"Well—" Candy's blandishing yielded to sudden decision. "I want to talk to you. I feel just terrible about this summer, and I know you do, too. Frances isn't very sympathetic. We can't stay in this awful place all summer!"

Hope leaped, a silver fish. "If you told Father—" Bill was hoarse— "You can always get him to do things."

"Oh, I wouldn't bother poor Noldy! But you see—" Candy leaned back against the wall, intent on the satin knob of ankle bone—"it would be much better if I went to camp. I wanted to go last summer, with the girls, but Noldy was so queer when I spoke of it— But no one could *expect* me to stay in an old apartment all summer. Riding, swimming, even dancing. Why, the marvellous dancing last night! That girl began in this very camp!"

Bill stared at her, horror in his eyes.

"Frances won't do a thing about it. It wouldn't cost much more. I have to eat, don't I? And clothes would cost lots more here in the city. You just wear shorts and things like that. I thought if you spoke to Father—just a word first— You're practically a man, and he'd listen to you."

"You mean you'd rather do that than go home? Go to a bloody camp"—

"Why, Bill Carlton!" Candy scrambled for her mule, stamped into it. "Just because you're a hermit, you might understand somebody else's wanting a little society." Her mouth trembled, her lashes shadowed her pale cheeks. "I'm sorry I spoke about it. You and Frances will just have to go your own selfish ways—"

Bill shuffled his feet. If the kid was going to cry— Then anger filled the little gap she had pried into his secret, strong devotion to her. Like Frances she was a traitor!

"While I sit cooped up here and *die!*"

"No, you won't," said Bill, in a bewildering moment of acumen. "You'll wheedle Father all by yourself until he does what you want even if he has to—has to mortgage the house!" With that he crashed out of the apartment.

It was late when he came back, and after a frantic search through his pockets, he reluctantly rang the bell. He'd forgotten to shift his keys. Hulda, neat and voluminous in her gray uniform, opened for him. She was glad to see some member of such a family. Mr. Carlton had telephoned he couldn't leave, whoever heard of a directors' meeting lasting till such hours, Frances had gone to dinner and the theater with a young man, and Candy had gone to Evelyn Lewis's, she'd called her up and asked her to ask her, Hulda had heard her at the telephone. "But as long as it's you has come, my dinner won't go to waste." Hulda picked up the cap he had dropped. "What you been doing to yourself?" she asked, her voice warming after her disgruntled recital. "You look all in."

"Me? I'm okay."

"Well, wash up, and don't take all night about it."

Bill plodded toward the bathroom. Bet he had a blister on one heel. Funny how tramping the pavement pounded the lights out of a fellow. As he turned the faucet he heard, above the rush of water, a strange noise, shriek and scramble, from the kitchen. Apathetically he shut off the water and listened.

"Get out of here! Get out—" and then the padding of Hulda's feet. "Bill! Where—" She was waving her hands before her face, panting. "Get it out, Bill! It's a bat, in my kitchen! It flew in my hair!" She brushed frantically at her head.

"It wouldn't bite you." Bill forgot his dusty, tired feet in a dash for the kitchen, Hulda at his heels. The flat disk of the overhead lamp threw brilliant light on the ceiling, on the bars of the suspended clothes dryer. Bill heard the frightened beat of wings, and thrust a hand against Hulda's puffing bosom. "Stay out. It's no bat. I'll—" He pulled the door shut. The wide kitchen window had the upper sash drawn down, and beyond glowed a patch of clear June twilight, arched above the murky haze which floated always over the city. And here, incredibly, in this kitchen—he located it, its frantic flutter still for an instant, on the fuse box over the broom closet. A thrush, a hermit! The brown freckles of the breast blurred, fear-melted, and it swooped along the ceiling, lodging on a bar of the dryer. Blown in from its northward flight? Surely the light hadn't drawn it. Save it, before it beat itself to death, here in this hostile prison.

Bill turned out the light. In the soft dusk he could see the small shape, motionless. With smooth quiet, with movement so slow he seemed scarcely to move at all, he mounted the little kitchen ladder; his hand crept up, up, and closed around the bird. For a moment he stood there, hand upstretched. The bird did not struggle; only its hot heart beat against his palm. Feathers soft with life, not the softness of silk nor wool nor snow nor any softness so much as living touch, intensified by the warmth. He had touched living birds, often, but this bird, caught here, thus, at the end of such a day as this, was suddenly to Bill more than a bird. Life in each filament of down. Like the skin of a beloved, he thought, and for once had no embarrassment at such a thought. And under the softness, hardness, wing stiffness, beak hardness,



prick of curling claw he felt excitement, strong as sex, like it, in his own body. There were mysteries in birds. Men made religion of them. He, himself, would make a covenant! He moved quietly to the opened window, held his strong, gentle hand to the sill, and opened his fingers. An instant, a wing brushed his thumb, or was it a thrust of rudder russet tail, and the bird was gone.

Bill stared off at the horizon murkiness. Sixth Avenue lay there, raucous, malodorous, narrow and roofed, lined with slouching men in clusters at dark stairways, where cards hung pencilled in black sooty marks. He had walked the length of it, reading the cards. Wanted, machine stitchers. Wanted, man and wife. Chauffeur. Boiler man. He had climbed the stairs, and stumbled down them again. He had not known he must offer money for a fee before the pasty jowled men or women within would listen to him.

What had the bird to do with what lay below there in the city? Never before had Bill thought of men as hungry, ravenous, hating, fearing. Life in his hand, everlasting waste down there in the streets. *I don't belong here.* The thrush was a sign. I'm going to find a way to do what I want to do.

"Is it gone?" Hulda called through the door.

Bill stumbled against the step-ladder, and flailed the air with a hand that could not locate the cord for the light. "Open the door," he shouted, "I can't see a damned thing." Hulda opened it a crack. "It's gone. And the next time—" he was loud, covering his excitement—"you turn out the light and clear out. You might kill it, bashing around the way you do. Give it a chance to fly out."

"Anyone'd bash with a bat in their hair!" Hulda darted for the stove, rattling covers on pots. "Mighta burned up my dinner."

"It was a thrush, a hermit thrush," said Bill, sternly.

"It had no business in my kitchen, and what's more, it's a bad sign. Are you going to eat dinner, or not?"

Bill was, and as he ate, the last rags of humiliation and unhappiness fell away from him. He wasn't lazy and good-for-nothing. He'd been trying to do the wrong things. He felt a kind of sacrilege in the degree to which he had accepted the attitude of his father. It would be years before he'd know enough to be much use. But if he kept pegging away— Somewhere there must be work for a fellow to do which had some connection with things outdoors, with things alive.

Hulda said, as she set his dessert before him, "Didn't I tell you your father was worked up? What would your poor mother think to see her house let?"

"He told you?"

"Frances did. I haven't got the heart to clean it up for strangers." Hulda set down a plate of cakes beside the large triangle of pie. "I just as leave stay in town for myself, but what are you going to do, when you can't run yourself ragged all summer?" She plodded away without waiting for an answer.

Bill wandered across the living room to the windows, and looked out. The dark river was windless tonight, but the out-running tide broke up the bright, staccato reflections of electric signs on the Jersey side. He listened, and heard in his head, distinct and perfect, the trinal plaintive fullness of the thrush's song. His mother had taught him that way of listening. She had said, "You can hear sounds, just as you can see images, if you will listen. It's a little harder, at first, but it is one more delight." At first he could think how the sound went, but he couldn't really hear it. Then, one day, almost as if a resistant membrane gave way, there was the sound itself! He was practicing on smells now, but they were much harder. They came as visual images of juniper or water or rain, not as odor itself.

He wondered whether his mother had thought of practicing on smells. If she were here—

He kept a habit, after all these years, of going over things in his mind, rehearsing them, choosing words carefully, as if when he reached home he would find her eager to hear what he had seen and done. His images of her were vague and shifting, unrelated to the photograph Frances had in a silver frame on her dresser. She was a state of being rather than a person. When he thought of her, he thought of her moods, her rare anger, her gayness, her serenity, her staunchness, and of things they had done together, places they had been; the visual image of her would almost form, and then dissolve, having been no more than some one detail, like dark fur with snow clinging to it, or her hand dipped into a little pool of a spring brook, transmuted to pure gold by the dark running water. Here in town he thought of her less often, but at home—He'd been pretty sick last summer when the girls turned her room into an extra guest room. He'd made a hell of a row, too, but they got Dad on their side. Well, he was glad of it now. The damage was done, and if the whole house was overrun with people who didn't belong there, he wouldn't have to care so much. The more the rest of them forgot her, the more she became his own, no longer to be shared with others.

He thought of the books which he had moved from the shelves of the secretary to his own room, dozens of them. He'd looked into some of them last summer, and planned to read them all. Gilbert White's *History of Selbourne*, Chapman's bird book, books by that fellow who'd lived in South America ... Hudson, his name was; a whole row of textbooks, their covers faded and dingy, Candace Langley written on the fly-leaves. His mother had known a lot. The men who wrote the books knew a lot, too.

Bill sat down suddenly on the window seat. The trouble with him was that he didn't know anything. His scalp prickled, for

all the world as if a new piece of his brain drew blood into unused cells. Had he ever tried to think before? He'd gone mooning along, feeling sorry for himself because he didn't like his father's plans for him, never looking any farther than the next hour he saw somewhere ahead for brief escape. He looked at his hand, feeling again the moment of the thrush's flight. He had wanted, this summer, just to go back to the same woods and fields and swamps, to see again what he had already seen, with no plan beyond the summer. Now, for the first time clearly, he thought of other men who had spent their lives as he would like to spend his. They set down their discoveries in books, Audubon painted his in pictures, they gave what they had learned to people duller and less patient. Never could it be all learned, all discovered, always there must be further mystery, change, modification. But there wasn't time enough in one life for a man to build from the beginning alone. You had to find out what the other fellows knew, and go on from there. Plain enough, once you saw it. They taught the stuff in colleges . . . biology, ecology, he remembered names on the backs of books. And he'd been wasting his time with muck. Now it was too late. His father didn't have any money. For a moment his excitement tipped, threatening to spill him into the sodden confusion with which he had come tramping home that evening. What was there, ever, that he could say to his father? Please, Dad, would you mind sending me to college for a few more years? I'd like to be a scientist, a—what was the word?—probably an ornithologist. Bill's face flamed to his ears. He could see his father looking at him, all eyebrows, mouth quirked.

Bill got to his feet. He'd have to think up something to say. Get a job if you can. Who wanted him? "You see, it's this way." Bill marched toward the wing-chair, halted, tried his hands first in his pockets, then more casually down against his thighs. "I'm not much good as I am. I looked around

quite a bit today." He cleared his throat, made his voice deeper. "If you could see your way clear— You may not think much of the idea, but I might get to be a credit to you." He paused. "Some men make quite a lot of money and get to be famous, too." That might be the best line. No use trying to explain how he felt, that nothing else was any use.

At the click of a key in the latch he dove for a chair, and swung one leg over the arm in an imitation of nonchalance. Could anyone at the door have heard him? Arnold came in, briefcase in one hand. He did not glance into the living room, but stood, scarecrow-limp. Bill peered at him uneasily. He didn't look any too cheerful, but he mostly didn't this spring. It wasn't a good idea to sit there staring at him; too like spying. Already a casual "Hi!" seemed oddly too late. Perhaps tonight wasn't a good time to start anything. Then Arnold shrugged, and with a slow turn, looked at Bill.

"Oh, you there. Hulda told me you were all out." He spoke dully, without surprise, and came forward, dragging up a corner of a rug, letting himself down into the big chair.

Bill undraped his leg and sat up straight. Nonchalance didn't seem to be the appropriate attitude. His father parked the briefcase against a leg of the chair and shut his eyes.

"Did you have any dinner?" asked Bill, searching for a good opening.

"All I want." Arnold pressed finger tips against his temples, hard, until his knuckles bulged. "Get me some aspirin, will you? A couple. Before my head cracks wide open."

Bill rushed for the medicine cabinet in his father's bathroom, came back spilling water in his haste. But Arnold didn't notice. He didn't even notice Bill at his elbow until the boy cleared his throat. Arnold swallowed the tablets, gulped water. "Bah! Lukewarm."

"I'll get you some with ice. I didn't wait—"

"Don't bother. I don't want it. And don't walk like an elephant."

Bill slunk away with the glass. He didn't have much luck, doing things.

"And Bill!" Arnold called after him. "Call the garage, will you? Ask them to send around for the car."

"I could drive it over," began Bill.

"Good excuse for you to vamoze?"

Bill telephoned. Well, maybe he had wanted to clear out. But not the way his father meant. Because he was uncomfortable. Because he'd like about once a year or so to do something his father would like. And if he stayed in, he'd have to tackle him. A headache wouldn't make any difference. He'd probably say, "No use wasting any more money on your education." I can't explain how I know this is different. But if he won't—if he won't, I'll find me a way!

Bill came back from telephoning, and tiptoed across the room to the window-seat. How long did it take aspirin to work a little? His throat was dry, his skin burned, his thoughts went lunging about in hunks of unspoken words. Arnold's fingers were restless on the arms of the chair, one foot danced jerkily. But he opened his eyes and looked at Bill, and suddenly his face changed into a smile, warm, apologetic, full of intensely personal recognition. "Thanks, old man," he said. "I sort of hoped you'd stick around."

"Sure," said Bill, gruffly, ramming a fist into a pocket. "You been having a bad day?" When his father looked at him that way, it got at him!

"It's been hell. Simple, unadulterated hell. And tomorrow will be another, and the next day another—" His smile faded into a grimace. "I know how men go crazy—they can't stop their minds from going around and around and around, the same things over and over and over, and never any way out,

any way ahead. Give me something else to think about for five minutes. What you been up to all day?"

Bill's heart gave a thud. Not that his father meant, really, that he wanted to know. Bill knew what he wanted, to be amused, diverted, the way Candy could do. "Well—" There was nothing he could offer! "A bird flew into the kitchen and scared Hulda out of her wits." (He'd never have a better chance! He couldn't wait till his father felt better about business.) "I caught it." He had it again in his hand, ineffable touch. "Of course that didn't exactly take me all day. Listen, Dad— I've been considering my future. Would you object if I discussed it, or does your head— That is, if you'd rather some other time—but I've been considering it."

"So have I, among other things." Arnold spoke drily. "I hope your considerations were brighter than mine."

"I'm sure they were, that is, I think they must have been." Bill was so heavy with purpose that his speech was ponderous. "You see, first I looked for a job, but there aren't any, at least not any I fit." Arnold was frowning now, his mouth ironic, and Bill hurried on. "You may not want to, of course, especially if you haven't any money, but if you had enough to start me, then if I was good enough, I could probably work part of my way through."

"Through what?"

"College."

"But good Lord, you've practically flunked out this year!"

"It was the wrong stuff and I hated it."

"What have you ever liked that was work?"

Stumbling, Bill tried to explain, in guarded, careful words folded about the brilliance of his feeling. That he must not betray, but if he could convince his father this was a thing a man might do, a way of making a living—

"You want me to set you up to college courses so that you

can turn into one of these guys with spectacles leaping about with a butterfly net and a tin box?"

"It wouldn't be butterflies," muttered Bill, despairingly.

"Seriously, Bill, just because you would rather fool around all day like a hound dog—you can't make a career of that! Look at the flop you've made of this year! I could understand it if you were hitting it up the way some of the young fellows do, bad gin, night clubs, chippies. But you don't even do that! You just stubbornly don't work. And now, when I'm half mad—What's to become of all of you if things get worse? If I crack up?—you have a new idea. If you were in earnest about it as work, you'd have known it earlier, seems to me."

"I knew what I liked," said Bill. He was crimson, and his heart stopped up his larynx, so that his voice sounded strange. "I never thought about making it a job. You all thought I was cracked, and I guessed I was. I thought I had to work at something I didn't like. I couldn't be like you." The concept of his father, built by slow accretion from childhood, was superimposed upon the actual man; his smoothness, his sureness, his lack of tolerance, the air of important concerns which vibrated about him, his charm when things pleased him. Bill felt it begin to grind him under in the dull agony of his own slowness, his awkwardness, his passions which must be forever concealed because they were so alien to his father. "I'm not smart like you. I couldn't ever learn to run a business. But I figured I had to try."

"So you think I'm smart." Arnold hitched himself up a few inches, and stared at Bill. "I used to think so. Lately I'm not so sure. Not so sure." His hands stopped their restless play along the chair. "I haven't meant to force you into something you hated." He paused, but Bill was silent, trying to swallow his heart back into place. "How do I know you'll keep at it, if I let you start?"

"It wouldn't take very long—" Bill choked. "I mean you



could tell in a short time— Maybe I could start this summer.”

“Good God, you aren’t offering to work in the summer?”

“I’d like to get at it.”

“Well, I’ll be—” Arnold sat upright at that, a speculative alertness lifting the sagging lines of his face. “That from you! Perhaps you’ve found the answer. Botanist, bugologist, biologist, what you going to be?”

“I don’t know exactly.”

“And if the whole system goes under, and the banks all fail, and the country is wrecked, you can go running around with your microscope or your telescope or your test-tubes and never even notice. Fine. I wish I’d gone in for a scientific career.”

“Go ahead and laugh at me!” Bill was reckless, swinging up on a wave of elation. “I don’t care who thinks I’m crazy if you let me try it.”

“Of course you’ll want someone to pay you. Too bad if everything goes to pot.”

Bill hunched his shoulders, trying to hold down the mounting elation. For an instant he felt that he touched the edge of some great wisdom, as if he found a feather dropped, and knew almost what great wings had beat above the treetops. The things his father meant, the everything which could go to pot—what had they to do with the search he had begun?

“May I ask—” his father’s voice pulled at him with its railery—“how you happened to get this bright idea? I think you’re right. Why didn’t you think of it before? What put it in your head today?”

“It was the books,” began Bill, off guard, so high had the wave lifted.

“What books?”

“Why, those books—” He squirmed, and could find no concealment. “Those my mother had. On her desk. I was thinking about them, and about asking Frances to bring them down

when she went out to the house. And I thought, well, those fellows worked at things I liked, so why couldn't I?"

"So. It was Candace."

The name spoken between them had the tingling quality of lightning streaking too close, and Bill felt the instinctive recoil lightning would cause. He got hastily to his feet. "I better be going. You must be tired hearing me gab."

"Wait a minute. What were the books?"

Bill stood at the door, twisting one foot around the other ankle.

"Oh, just some books she had." (Keep out! Stay away! I won't talk about Her!)

"You might answer my question."

"I don't remember all the names." Miserably Bill went on. If he made his father angry, he might lose his chance. "They were books she liked best. Some of them—I guess some of them she had in college. We used to look up things in them to find their names." (You never cared a rap about my mother's books! Why should you go asking all these questions now?)

"Your mother was in college when I first met her." Arnold swung his chair a small angle so that he could look at Bill. "She wanted to go back." He pressed the tips of his flexible long fingers together, the thumbs revolving slowly, "Only she married me instead. But she kept her books, did she?" He nodded. "That's where your hobby started, of course."

"She knew a great deal," said Bill, belligerently. "She knew just about everything, even if she did get married."

Arnold cocked one eyebrow. "I suppose she did. And I don't know anything, is that it?"

Sullen antagonism settled on Bill's mouth, shadowed his eyes, an old antagonism plowed under year by year since his mother's death, part jealousy, part resentment, based on a child's intuitive response to the emotional texture of the house-

hold. All of Candace's care about the surface of her life with Arnold had perhaps deepened the antagonism, since never was there outlet for it, nor admission that the resentment had any cause. Bill had never lifted his feeling into the region of words: now, being older, he thought fiercely, "I won't talk about her! Not to you. You didn't care enough!"

Arnold laughed. "You're honest, if not tactful, aren't you? Well, perhaps Candace planned just this. She cared as little about the business as you do. You're sure—" his glance whetted itself against Bill's brooding silence—"that this isn't a hang-over from bed-time stories? No, don't say it. You express it fully without a word."

Bill turned into the hall, fists clenched. His father's voice, deeper, richly persuasive, followed him.

"Come back, you young idiot! Can't you see I'm just letting off a touch of rancor because a book left by your mother can do more for you than I can? The point is, I have a hunch you've hit the right thing, and Candace would have known sooner." Then, as Bill did not move, Arnold came after him in a stride. "Look here, Bill!" Bill looked, and Arnold dropped his outstretched hand. "You're almost as tall as I am," said Arnold, unexpectedly. "You were just a shaver when your mother died."

(Jeeze, thought Bill, agonized, I hope the old man isn't going mushy!)

"Do you remember her distinctly? Or weren't you old enough?"

"I was plenty old enough."

Arnold stared a moment longer. To Bill, the hunger under his dark brows was unwarranted curiosity, the attempt to pull words out of him only a kind of bullying, in exchange for the boon of college. He felt vaguely uncomfortable as his father shrugged and went back to his chair.

"I'm much obliged," he said, "that you are willing to let me

try—" He cleared his throat apologetically. "I'll look around and find what'll cost the least. I— I'm really much obliged." Arnold did not answer, and Bill hastily retreated to his own room. Safely within, he glared at the closed door. "The old so and so!" He muttered, stoning down with his anger that moment of self-reproach, of guilt—something from the way his father had walked, his knees all loose. "Was I old enough to remember? Huh! Trying to worm out of me— Never said a word all these years, and then— I was a damn fool, letting it slip about the books." Bill yanked at his necktie, and then dangled it from his fingers, while anger, discomfort, resentment were sucked under, chips lost in the whirl of elation. "Jeeze, I can do it! I've got my chance."

## 2.

Arnold pressed his fingers against his eyeballs and watched bright motes move in whorls from a center of pain out to edges of blackness. The aspirin hadn't done a thing but concentrate the pain there behind his eyes. Much obliged, Bill was saying. Yes, they all were, when he gave them what they asked for. Much obliged and to hell with you. Churlish, self-centered— Couldn't the boy see he had wanted to talk? Arnold let his hands fall. No use poking out his eyes.

Curious impulse he had had, wanting to talk about Candace. Why, for a moment there he could have throttled the boy, forcing him to disgorge what his memory of her was, how he thought of her. He had wanted the boy's knowledge of her to augment his own, after that gripe of jealousy in which he had caught a glimmer of what the boy retained. How furious Bill had looked! As if Arnold threatened to despoil him, as if he had no right— That of course was nonsense. Bill had been too young. It was only a quirk in his make-up, which made him suspicious, afraid that someone

would intrude upon any of his private matters. He ought to outgrow it, thought Arnold. Makes him damned hard to get on with. I tell him yes, he can have what he wants, and he can't wait to get off alone, away from me. Where I'm going to get the funds— I'm not going back over that tonight. I can't stand it. There's no use in planning, in foresight. Can't count on anything now. Just take it, day by day. His thoughts moved like jaded horses, thrusting galled shoulders into the collar, to start again the treadmill of recent catastrophe: if he had done this, if he hadn't tried that, if he had sold sooner, if he hadn't banked that heavy loan the day he did, just before the bank closed on both securities and loan, if he could shut the doors of the factory for a while— He twisted in his chair. Stop it! He could still go through the motions of production. They'd cut out the night shifts, they'd let some of the younger help go, those without families, they'd cut wages. The less his output, the greater the loss. Overhead, depreciation, more accidents, too, as if a man's anxiety about his job affected his control.

Arnold kicked at his portfolio; he'd decided, on his way home, after he'd driven through a red light and meshed bumpers with a truck, that he'd take a night off, rest, not think. But when he stopped thinking about the business, his mind tacked off into a kind of stock-taking of himself. He hadn't indulged much in that the past four years. Just after Candace's death, he'd had a spell, moodiness, trying to get things straight. Then he'd got the children settled, he'd reached a few decisions and kept them, too. It might be well to postpone intimacies until the children were older and out from under foot. It was a new thought to Arnold, a precipitate from the embarrassment of the Barth affair, that in his relations to his children he had somewhat to approximate the figure he wished them to behold. Nor was it an easy thought, so long had he assumed that they would accept him in the guise he presented

to them, and what else he was or did lay well outside their concern. Disconcerting, this first admission that the image of himself which a man constructed for inspection might not be the image seen. He had no wish to marry again; he could imagine no woman for whom he would undertake the labor of a permanent relationship, and being unprotected, he was wary. As for light affairs, he thought he might take them as they came. Then, curiously, they didn't come. His approach to women had been that of the gay hunter, and a hunter suspicious that he may step into the trap of marriage, hampered by growing knowledge that he is less clever than he had thought in concealing his tracks from observers, is not light of foot nor ingenious in attack. It's like the radio, he thought, pleased with his figure. Sex has its own wave length. If you're tuned in, you pull it out of the ether, tunes a-plenty. He'd twirled the knob. He could wait.

He had, then, channelled all his energy into the business. The way things had climbed steadily kept a man from probing around in himself. The kind of success he'd had was a sedative to doubt, a stimulant to further effort. Now sedative and stimulant were gone: Arnold had, at times, a feeling so strong that it was valid as a dream to the dreamer, that he had been a passenger on a train, on a ship, which had stopped abruptly in night, at an unknown place, and that he must hasten to gather up whatever was his own and save himself before some menace hurled itself downward.

Tonight, as soon as he entered the apartment, Bill had popped at him, in that alarmed, hostile way, as if Arnold was a secret enemy. To be sure, Arnold's first thought had been: camouflage, thrown up so I won't notice his miserable failure this year. Naïvely explaining he supposed work had to be something he didn't like. The point was, the boy might as well stay on in college, if he wanted to, as long as Arnold could scrape up a few dollars. He was damned right, he

couldn't get a job, a cub like that. What was going to happen to all the young fellows just coming along? There seemed a monstrous fallacy in the idea that all a man needed to get ahead was shrewdness and industry. Well, wiser heads than his could get worse headaches than his trying to explain what had gone wrong. He'd tried to find out, reading editorials in the *Tribune*, talking with men at the club, reading little books full of glibness and proof errors from the speed of their production. He knew most of the phrases men used as explanation.

Like the men with whom he talked, he had a profound need to reduce the reasons for the still mounting disaster to some simple cause, a fact a man could understand and then handle, something simple and concrete, like an unpaid war debt, or sovietism, or prohibition, or the drought, or the Democrats. And like other men he was bewildered and then appalled by an inability to discover that neat first cause, by a suspicion which all but annihilated him, that he had no potency, no independent power, that he was less than a mote in a dust cloud blown by a great confused wind. He didn't care about this mote-feeling, he resisted annihilation, he thought: all I can do is to plod along as if what I do may begin again to have results.

But he had meant, tonight, to leave the world and business alone. What did a man think about, if he had cut out women, and had no important conference for the next day, no heady success of the present day to mull over? He'd wanted Bill to stay and talk. Damn it, he'd tried to be friends with the boy, hadn't he? Queer boy, not much like his father at nineteen. Had Candace's death been harder on him than on the girls? Frances was older; she'd got along smoothly enough these past years, done very well, too, for a girl. He was proud of her. He hadn't seen much of her, she'd been so busy. And Candy, perhaps he had spoiled her, but she was really fond of him;

she had a gift for getting the juice out of every minute. He didn't believe she'd missed her mother long. But Bill didn't make friends readily. He'd been at a hard age, adolescence just starting. He's my son, thought Arnold, but there's nothing of me in him. He's all Candace's. I could understand him better if he had a touch of the devil. By the time I was his age— Arnold checked himself. He didn't exactly mean he'd prefer it if Bill went chippie-chasing and got tight, did he? A man had to begin sometime, and if he put it off too long it took him in a bad way. They'd been pretty ribald about chastity when he was young. Nowadays, paradoxically, Bill, and even Candy, would come out with some shameless, matter-of-fact remark about sex which shocked Arnold, and yet he was willing to bet Bill had never touched a girl. And Candy was just a kid, with her first beaus. He'd as soon she didn't know some of the things she seemed to, but he'd decided that a good deal of the talk about the wildness of the age came from bold words rather than from actual wildness. Anyway, it began to look as if the kids just growing up would have a sober time of it for a while. You didn't rampage much if your folks were stony broke.

He wondered, with no clear bridge to this thought from the last, whether Candace had talked to Bill, presenting him with some romantic ideal of purity. Well, he'd never know. He'd guessed quite by accident that she had started all this nature stuff. He'd like to know. What she said to her son might have a clue to what she had thought of him, the father. Strange that he should, at times, have this tearing need to know what, at the end, had been her figure of him, when it had mattered little to him. That wasn't precisely true. Arnold sat up taller in his chair, his hands quiet. He had been sure he understood. He had thought, when rarely some glance or word abraded his complacency; she's like all women, expecting men to be saints, objecting to natural male peccadilloes. Had



she been lonely? Or did a woman find secret satisfactions in her children which a man could never know? Wasn't there always something lopsided in your relation to a child? You took care of them, you harbored them, you enjoyed them, your withers were wrung with anxiety about them, you put up the best front you could, so they wouldn't think too badly of you; and in return they took you for granted, they had shrewd young eyes for your weak spots, they were so damned busy with their own affairs they couldn't be concerned with you except as a means to their ends. Take the three of them when he'd told them about the house. Not one even wondered how he felt about it, not one cared what he was up against. To Frances, it was a chance to take a job instead of coming home. Bill bounded out of his first woe into a fine new scheme. Perhaps Candy would have a trace of sympathy; she came nearer it at times. But on the whole you didn't get much back. Lopsided. If you were worn down with the bitter, losing fight, they whispered, "Dad's crochety tonight! Look out!" and pretty soon they had gone off, each of them after his own pleasure. Well, what did he want? Not gratitude. He'd like to have somebody think about him, for a change. He'd spent the last six years thinking pretty steadily about them, when he wasn't giving his attention to his business.

Arnold came up in his chair with a violent movement, in one of those amazing moments when the self breaks through accumulated blindness for a flash of discovery. It was true, that since Candace's death he had tried, spasmodically at first, with lapses, to—what?—to figure out the children, to understand what they were up to, to offer not a substitute for their mother, but rather another kind of security for that which they had lost. It hadn't been easy, he kept making mistakes, but he'd plugged along, sort of a dull dog as far as his own private hours were concerned. He hadn't noticed what was happening to him during the big days of business. What had? What did

he get out of it all? That was the way Candace had loved them, from the beginning. It was a way of love he had known nothing about. He would have said he had always loved his children, but he had loved them as his possessions, he had found them occasionally diverting, amusing, or annoying. He would have said he had loved Candace, and now with a dreadful simplicity he saw that he had loved her as a child loves, taking her for granted, accepting what she gave, as unconcerned as any child with what she thought or felt, with what she was. Perhaps between a man and woman, sex set up a warfare, so that this other kind of love, which had tenderness, which grew into a wise and brooding patience, which found security, was never attainable. He had felt himself quite a man, with all his conquests. They were all alike, and Candace must have known it. If she were here now, she could laugh and say, "Why, Arnold, are you having growing pains at last?"

At the sound of the lock Arnold lunged backward in the chair, one hand over his eyes. He felt too naked, too shaken, to be seen. But even before the door closed Candy was calling, "Hi! Who's home? Oh, there you are!" and he dropped his hand to watch her quick, gay pounce upon him.

"If I'd known you were here, Noldy, I'd come home hours ago!" She pulled at his hand and whirled herself into his embrace, settling on the arm of the chair.

"You wouldn't think of staying home, just in case I did come?" What had he been grouching about? Candy returned his love. She gazed at him with a soft intensity, lips parted, eyes deep blue under the long lashes; her clear fine skin seemed almost luminous.

"Hulda told me you didn't know *when* you'd be home, and I was lonesome so I went to the Lewises for dinner. You know, Noldy, Evelyn's father says the most sarcastic things to her! And she says quite mean things back. Why, I couldn't

breathe if you talked that way to me! I told her my father was very different, and she thought I must be pretty lucky."

"And what did you say then?" Arnold's arm tightened around her slight waist, and she slipped down against him, head on his shoulder, sweet smell of her fine dark hair in his nostrils. She had no more bones than a kitten.

"I'll give you just one guess," Candy sighed. "Evelyn says she's just existing until she can go away to camp. Most of our crowd are going this summer except Paula, and she was going only now she's going to Europe instead, and so there is a vacancy." Candy's soft voice had a dreaming, remote tone. "They're crazy about it, and they're all going in for dancing this summer, because this dancer we saw the other night, Margot, only that isn't her real name, started at this very camp with the instructor there. Evelyn couldn't ever dance, she's too clumsy. Her father was perfectly brutal about that! They all just begged me to come, but I said I couldn't possibly leave my father."

Arnold looked down at the top of her head. The pressure of her body against his arm had altered, as if she stiffened her spine to listen.

"You don't want to, do you?"

"Of course you're so terribly busy, and if we aren't going to the country— They all think I'd be tops at dancing. I can't imagine what I'd do here all summer. Only if you haven't any money at all— But I might earn scads of money if I got to be a real dancer."

"See here, Candy!" Arnold withdrew his arm with a jerk, and Candy moved back to the chair arm, her eyes ardent and ingenuous. "What kind of a ride are you taking me for? We settled this camp idea last summer."

"That was different." Candy blinked, and tears made points of her lashes. "We all went back home." Like a firefly folding its wings, the way the radiance vanished, leaving her skin

dull, her mouth drooping, her body listless. "But I won't ask you, I won't speak of it again."

"I suppose it will be dreary, sticking here in town." Arnold got stiffly to his feet and crossed to the window, exasperated anger raking his tired head. That he couldn't keep his own house, his own children! "I thought for a minute you meant it, not leaving me."

"I did! Truly I meant it!"

"But all the same you'd prefer this camp."

"You could come to visit me, they have days for parents."

"I'll tell you one thing." Arnold swung around from his blank stare at distant lights. "You don't need to be a dancer or anything else." He watched her a moment, the grimness of his face gone as he smiled. In that white silk dress, with strapped patent leather sandals, huddled on the chair, she looked like such a baby! "You practice on me a few more years, and you can get just what you want from any man in the world!"

"Noldy! I wasn't practicing. I said I wouldn't speak of it again." She flung herself toward him, color high in her cheeks. "I did mean it. I wouldn't leave you ever, ever, ever!" She stamped out the last words.

"You're quite right. If I can't keep the home—" He laid his fingers over a muscle twitch under his eye. "How much does camp cost? Maybe I can't afford it."

"Oh, Noldy!" Candy breathed delight, the light glimmered again. "May I really go? Darling Noldy! And you'll come to see me?"

"We'll see."

"I'll get the folder about it, and you'll see how marvellous it is. You wait right here!"

Arnold sat on the window bench, something rueful in his half smile. It was the best scheme, if he could find the money. The place must be all right, if the school recommended it.

He wouldn't have much left from the rent of the house, but there was the chance he might sell it. And anyway—he looked down at his hands. The veins bulged along the backs, the skin was flaccid and wrinkled at the knuckles. God, they were an old man's hands! He'd give Candy what she wanted as long as he could, as long as he lasted!

Suppose he did close the factory until late fall; if things were ever going to pick up, they surely would by then. Save the pay-roll, save this desperate scramble for cash, the heart-breaking failure to get orders, take it easy, wait till something broke. That's what Bossert had wanted, bleating all through the meeting today that they were headed for ruin, that if they stepped out now they might save their skins. Arnold had stood out against them. You couldn't run a business like his without getting to know your men. Take Andy, head of shipping, with a wife, and a new baby, and a house he hadn't finished paying for. Take old Wiggin, with a crippled daughter and two sons out of work. Take any of them! How would they look if Arnold posted a notice: After June 15 this factory will close until further notice. "You're too soft, Carlton," Bossert had sneered at him. "Plants are shutting all over the country. It's not our fault. What ails you? You used to have a good hard head." He hadn't noticed that dig at the time. You could talk about shutting down the plant if your imagination went no further than rows of figures on paper. Like reading of an earthquake in Japan. Too bad, you said, and went on to the next bit of news. But if you knew even one man there, the disaster lost its abstract remoteness. To Bossert the factory was a way of collecting dividends; the hands were hands, not people, so many men and girls at such wages. Why else call them hands, instead of men, or even heads or feet? Heads of cattle, hands of human beings. And so Bossert could say too bad, and mean his reduced income. You used to have a hard head, Bossert had said. Was it softness, this determination to

keep things going? Was it sentimental paternalism, his stubborn notion that the men had a right to expect him to stick it out unless—until complete and utter ruin swamped him? Because his own imagination could furnish him a hundred instances in a breath of what this particular earthquake would mean.

"If we close, it's another blow for the town," he had insisted. "Now a few hundred men can pay for flour and fuel."

"Fuel for the cars they drive," Bossert had grumbled, with a murmur of applause from the group. "Labor's overreached itself. That's the trouble. You can't cure what's wrong by losing your last cent, Carlton."

"Will it be cured if every manufacturer folds up?" And finally he had won out. He wasn't going back on it. He hadn't touched his insurance yet. He could borrow somewhere against it. Was he soft? The word nagged at him. Ten years ago—He didn't know so many of the men then. He'd been around the plant more, especially the past few years. He'd got to know some of them pretty well. Had to have something to talk about. Pleasant feeling about the shops, with wages climbing, bonuses at Christmas, and all. Perhaps he'd made himself more accessible, liking the way some of them dropped into the office to consult him. Well, the pleasant feeling was gone, and in its place an apprehensive tightening of belts, a shoving closer together, a watchfulness for his next move. It wouldn't be shutting the plant. Not yet. He eyed the portfolio beside the chair, and frowned. He wouldn't open it tonight. Had to get some sleep. If he started on actual figures, he'd find himself beating around in the same frenzy of circles. He'd take some more aspirin and crawl in. What had happened to Candy? She'd been gone long enough to find a dozen catalogues. He listened, and smiled at the unmistakable sounds of the last stage of a failing search, slamming of drawers, rattling of papers, rush of heels. Candy never knew where anything was.

He'd tell her tomorrow would do. As Arnold rose, she came rushing back, cheeks flushed, hands distracted.

"I can't find it, Noldy! I've looked everywhere! Oh demnition, when you were just going to look at it and tomorrow you might change your mind! If Frances took it, I—I don't know *what* I'll do to her!"

"I guess my mind will stay the same overnight." Arnold laughed at her, she was so amusingly pretty. "Why should Frances take it? She doesn't by any chance want to go to camp, too, does she? I can't swing two of you."

"Good-night, no! Why, she doesn't even—" Candy stiffened at the click of the Yale lock. "Please, Noldy, don't discuss it with her! She—"

Behind her Frances opened the door softly, and stepped inside. Arnold had a glimpse of her face in the moment before she lifted her eyes and seeing the two of them tried to put away whatever she had brought with her. By God, she's just been kissed, thought Arnold. She carried her hat, her fair hair ruffled, her mouth and full lids had a sweet and dreaming relaxation.

"Hello! You still up?" She closed the door and slid out of sight.

Powdering her nose, covering it up. Arnold knew she must be staring into the mirror. Too late, my girl. I know that look! The pain behind his eyeballs swelled into a definite beat. A nice note, if after he'd given her all the college she wanted, she had nothing better to do—

A trifle flushed, the afterglow a trifle subdued, she came into the room. "I thought everyone would be in bed." The tempo of her words was speeded up. "Goodness, it's late enough! I'm so sleepy I'm going." She patted fingers over a yawn.

"What you been up to?" asked Arnold. (As if he hadn't enough to worry over!)

"Oh, we went to dinner at a Russian restaurant, and then we were going to the theater, but we stayed so long listening to the music it was too late."

"Who's the other half of the we?" Arnold kept his voice temperate, in spite of the pounding in his head.

"It's a man I know. You wouldn't know him. They have fascinating food, all Russian dishes, with queer names like borsch and blimi, and the musicians wear Russian costumes, and play Russian music, wild and melancholy, and one man danced, in Russian boots, whirling and leaping and stamping; oh, it was wonderful!"

"Did your young man have a Russian name, too?"

"Oh, no, Father!" Frances laughed. "He's not a Russian. He just heard about this restaurant. Well, you two can sit up all night if you like. I'm going to bed." Something both stubborn and evasive flashed in her quick glance at Arnold before she fled.

"She needn't be so secretive," said Candy, indignantly. "It's probably that same little shrimp."

"That sounds attractive." Arnold walked slowly across the room. He should have known better than to ask. Queer how a direct question sometimes put Frances's back up. "No, don't tell me. I don't care to know."

"Well, he isn't a bit taller than Frances." Candy hugged her father's arm, walking with him to his door. "If ever I get married, it will be to a man as tall as you are, with handsome black eyebrows!"

Arnold smiled, and pinched her cheek gently. "Good-night, Sugar."

He sat on the edge of the mahogany bed and lifted one foot, fingers pulling at the shoe-lace. If he bent over his head would burst. The intense resentment which had crackled in him subsided. Frances was ordinarily frank enough. She didn't have Bill's angry reticence, unless the matter touched emotion. So



he had been right, that exposed moment at the door. He hadn't been concerned about her young men for some time, she treated them so casually, she was so absorbed in college affairs. That summer before she entered, just after the wretched business with that woman, there'd been too much Phil Whiting in the air. Arnold had never known exactly what happened but thank God it was Anne and not Frances who ran off with him and then came home again to have a baby. Just as well it was born dead; they could call it premature. Lena'd had that pill to gag on, not he. Since then there had been various followers, none very persistent or detectably ardent, and Arnold, watching, had thought: she hasn't a drop of feminine coquetry, she hasn't a wile to her name, and all this college work is just emphasizing the rest of her. She'll be a cold-blooded blue stocking. To be sure, some of the yarns she told about girls in her classes sounded as if college didn't always have that effect. Now, if she'd fallen for someone—shrimp, Candy had said—Arnold dropped his shoe and slowly, not to jar his head, lifted his other foot. He would not ask her again. If he rated no confidence whatever—He could see her as she had stood at the door, charming, softly curved body, the subtle evocation of delight in her face. Damn it, he didn't want any man pawing her! He was afraid for her. Afraid that she would not love lightly, that like Candace—He wanted—He flung the second shoe to the floor. What he wanted was aspirin, lots of it, and sleep, and release from all pain.

## 3.

In her own room Frances stood at the window. If she leaned close to the glass she could see beyond the lighted squares of the building across the narrow street, a wedge of dark water and dark sky. The glass was cooler than her cheek, smooth-cool, not like warm flesh.

She supposed Father was furious with her. Why couldn't she just have said, "A man named Maclaren Brooks," as if it were any other name? Maclaren. But it wasn't a name, it was an incantation, a spell, a secret rite. She couldn't have spoken it without betrayal. Her voice would have made a song of it, it would have exploded into stars like a Roman candle. She wasn't ready, yet, to share it. "I'd like not to see anyone, nor speak to anyone until I am a little used to the way I feel." They would talk about him, Candy would say, "Good-night! What you see in him!" Perhaps Father wouldn't appreciate him at first. Why, even Frances hadn't known for several weeks that she was going to love him. (Oh, darling, I liked you from the very beginning! I didn't know love happened this way. I thought you fell smack into it. First I just liked the way you talked, and I used to think over things you said, and then I began to notice how you looked, and days when you looked tired, I worried about you. And then—) Maclaren had said: "I was smarter than you. The first time I saw you, I wanted to kiss your eyelids. Do you know how sweet they are?" Frances closed them softly, feeling his moth-kiss. Why hadn't she known the instant she saw him? No one knew Maclaren Brooks by looking at him. He wore his face, his body, as a mask, as a coat of armor, not as a cellophane wrapper.

Could she remember how he had looked when she first saw him? Or was that picture overlaid by all the days since? Deliberately she went back, setting the scene: Professor Rogers' office. She had gone to consult about a term paper, she had waited a few minutes in the outer office, and Maclaren had come in. He had glanced impatiently at her, at the closed door, and gone to stand at a window. Detail by detail, as if she drew a picture, Frances produced that figure, slight, not very tall, blue coat shiny across the shoulder blades, head high-domed, one hand shooting up to smooth the dark hair. He had turned

quickly, and to prove she wasn't embarrassed that he caught her staring, she had looked a moment longer before she opened a book. She had thought him almost homely, with high forehead, rimmed spectacles that sat on high cheek-bones and hid his eyes, a sharp nose, and a straight, ironic mouth. His tie, she remembered, had slipped a little under one point of the blue collar. Then she remembered the way he had moved to a chair. She hadn't really seen it at the time! The way he handled his body should have told her this was no ordinary man. The easy, silent, perfectly adjusted, flowing movement—that was Maclaren. Frances rocked her arms trying to find words for what was Maclaren. He'd gone on further than most people, she thought. Fine, sensitive, courageous,—there were no words for Maclaren, for the feeling she had. Like slowly walking forward into light, these months of discovery. And the light was Maclaren. But other people, her father, Bill, Candy, would see him only as she first saw him. Fierceness ached in her breasts at the need to defend him against any jot of belittling. Some day, when he had written his poems, his plays, he would need no defence. Everyone then would know the things she had begun to know. Until then she would guard him, would weave her flesh into his armor. "You won't have an easy time, do you realize? I won't mean to hurt you, but I will. I'll never have any money. I'll forget you for days on end when I'm at work and hate you if you interrupt. I'll be the devil to get along with."

"Will you be loving me?" Frances had leaned closer beside him, the night air sweet in her hair, as the bus lumbered up the Drive.

"Till I die."

"All right." And suddenly they were wildly gay, hurling at each other fantastic pictures of what they would do, how they would act, until the bus reached the end of its route, and the

conductor poked his head out of the stair-well straight into their laughter.

"We don't have to get off, do we? Can't we buy the bus?"

"Pay your fares, then." He was Scotch and dour.

No one else climbed to the top as they rode back, and their laughter was drowned under the ecstasy of touch. Frances closed her eyes, remembering his mouth on hers. She had clasped her hands behind his head, holding him, and he had leaned back against the noose of her linked fingers to watch her; in the half-darkness his face had seemed mysteriously altered, so passionate and tender that she had drawn it down against her throat before she wept. At the doorway of the apartment house they had stood a moment, where the side lamps threw bright light, and stared in amazement that they were not more changed from all they knew. "Must you go now?" he had asked. "When you're gone, I shall think I've only dreamed this again."

"Then call me up and ask me." The doorman had pushed open the door and with a sober "Good-night," Maclaren had gone. Tomorrow she would see him again. Never once had they arranged to meet. "How did you ever know where I was?" Frances would say, the tingling-sweet shock of his appearance hurrying her words, when he suddenly fell into step beside her as she crossed the library steps, or drew a chair beside hers at a table, or climbed on a stool at the lunch room counter. And he would laugh, delighted as a child. "I always can find you. I wet a finger and hold it in the wind, I pick up the scent. Never try to hide from me." That was days ago, before he had touched her, before he had spoken of love, and Frances had thought: he's hunting for me. He's not quite sure yet, he's so doubtful of himself, of love, of me. I can wait. Then tonight, as they walked along the noisy street after the hours of Russian music, he had said: "I feel like that Russian fellow. I want to stamp and leap and shout about you until

you can't hold out another second, and then swoop upon you. Hi-oo-hey!" No one heeded the shout, and Frances let her hand melt into his. "Do you think we might get married?" He was almost running now, his hand grasping her wrist.

"Yes! Yes!" Frances had no breath for words.

Then they had waited at the corner for a bus, while Mac-laren explained excitedly that he never meant to get married, that a writer had no business to marry, but he would be forever lost without her. And Frances had said, "We might as well get married right away, so you'll get used to it, and I can do things for you."

They had, for a short time, while the bus moved through the bright streets of down-town, been practical. Maclaren had a small job with a publishing house, editing manuscripts, enough for him to live on. He'd see if they'd give him more work. Frances cried out against that. Slave for her, and do none of his own work? She had a job of her own. She'd keep it. But what about children? Don't you want children? Oh, yes, yes! But later, not the first minute!

Frances turned from the window and moved slowly across the dark room, one hand extended. She would undress in the dark, she would lie down in her bed, she wouldn't sleep lest she lose a moment of this first joy. She would tell Doris first. Doris had said, "If you're wise, you'll wait till you know you are in love. Your body might be content with less, but you wouldn't." In a moment she had slipped out of the few silk garments, had found the pajamas folded at the foot of the bed, and had curled in bed, knees drawn up, head on one bent arm. She was tired, with a heavy and delicious fatigue, but the wind of excitement blew through her head in gusts, stirring what she had felt or heard or said of love. Phil, that summer four years ago. She had been so wretched over that childish affair—but why had that flung her at Phil? She had wanted him to kiss her, to hold her tight in long straining

embraces. When he wanted more, she had been frightened. "Lord, Fran, it's fun! Listen, you don't know till you try, do you?" Only then he and Anne had run off to Greenwich and got married. Phil was tight, of course, and Anne was jealous. After that other men, a few. She rather liked being kissed, and she grew more adroit in forestalling, in taxi-cabs or night-club booths, the moment when the young man wanted more. The girls talked about it, usually at night sessions. "There are two schools of thought." That was Julia Wells, the pretty blonde junior who had taken Frances as freshman in charge. "The attack abrupt, Have at you, my hearty! And the 'How do you like it?' with sly, insinuating fingers. When you know those two, you know them all."

"It's such a bore, being mauled when you don't want it."

"Well, my pet." Julia had shrugged, an odd, pinched expression on her face. "When you've had more than kissing, that isn't enough."

"Of course, if you're in love—"

"Love? Listen to the baby. She believes in Santa Claus."

Frances listened as the talk went on. It's as if we each led a double life, she thought. Day life, night life. Here's Julia, honor student, keen about the career she's going to have, here'm I, excited because I'm in college when I thought I never should be, and Mary's made Phi Beta Kappa, and all the time there's this other thing going on, like your heart beating or your lungs breathing, and if you pretend it's not there you get complexes or you wake up in the night from a strange and forgotten dream with your body feeling not yours at all, but like a harp still humming with a tune you have not heard.

It was because of Julia that Frances had gone to Aunt Doris the spring of her second college year. She had not seen her often, part of a tacit bargain between her and Arnold. He would give her four years of college if she'd drop the notion

of being a lady doctor. Frances did not know quite why she had so readily relinquished the idea. Partly because she had a new impatience to be about some life of her own, and being a doctor, when you figured it out in terms of years and work and dependence, took such ages. Partly, and only Doris knew this, because she had suffered such agony when Doris had taken her on her rounds in hospital and operating room. She had insisted on following her a second morning. "It's only that I'm not used to it," she had cried. And that noon she had watched Doris calmly eating luncheon. "How can you eat? After all you have seen— I can't forget it, that little boy, that dreadful—"

"You might grow hardened, Frances. But I wonder—" Doris buttered a roll. "I wonder if you really want to. A natural doctor sees an injury as a problem. He's concerned with what he can do about it. You feel it as suffering. You have an entirely feminine imagination. I've had to learn to control mine."

"But I ought to stand it."

"Why? There are other things to do where you might need to make yourself over less."

"But you aren't hard and cruel."

"Often I wish I were." Doris had looked at her with quiet, compassionate eyes. "I'd have an easier time. You see, I don't want you to take up medicine because you admired me when you were a little girl. Why not let it ride for a year or so?"

Frances had cried a little, had been comforted by Doris's, "You'll find out what you really wish, now you're started."

Although Frances seldom saw Doris, being separated from her by the wall a city and its intensity of occupations build, so much more subtly potent than any stretch of miles, a wall scaled only by intention and effort, she knew always that Doris was there if she needed her. She had only to walk along the narrow street, ring the bell, nod to the little colored maid,

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and wait in the living room until Doris came to stand at the door, with, "Frances! How nice to see you!" in her rich, warm greeting voice.

Julia had come to Frances's room in the dormitory one Friday morning, had backed against the door, hand taut on the knob. Her colorless face had a film of terror, in spite of lipstick and pencil-line of brows.

"Are you going home today?" she asked.

"I was. Why?"

"Listen, my pet." Julia came toward her like a wooden doll, imitating desperately the pose of slick, hard raillery she affected. "I'm ruind. I've got to have some first aid to the injured. I—" Her pose cracked, and she flung herself down on the bed, arms twisted over her head. "Don't just stare at me! What am I to do? A maiden in the Greek Play! Graduate in June! Maiden, style of 1930! When does a baby begin to show? Frances—" She rolled half over. "Didn't you say you had an aunt who is a doctor? Would she take the baby out of me?"

Frances sat down, knees weak. "Are— are you sure?"

"Last month I worried a bit. I'm never good on dates. But it's weeks now. Oh, Christ on a Mountain! My father is so proud of me. Frances, I can't bear it, I can't bear it." Her teeth chattered, and she caught her crimson lip. "Oh, women have a lousy time. I'm sick as a dog this morning. That's a sign, isn't it? I know where I can get an address...but you're never sure—I haven't a cent. They say it takes five hundred. Frances!"

Frances had run along the hall to the telephone. Dr. Langley was in, office hours till twelve. She and Julia had stood in the vestibule of a crowded morning subway car, Julia making wise-cracks in Frances's ear until Frances said, "Don't be funny, Julia. It isn't funny." As they walked the cluttered, noisy blocks across to Doris's office Frances peered at Julia,

Under her black hat the pale gold curls shone: her skin did look dry, dusted with fear-pollen. She had repainted her bitten lip.

"What's she like, your aunt?" Julia shrank against Frances and the two halted, as a bell shrilled underfoot, the sidewalk trap gaped upward, and grinning at them behind his pile of cartons, a negro was hoisted slowly, a dummy in a slow-action movie. The girls dodged past the tail of a truck backed in for loading, edged a group of watching idlers, and Julia's fingers bit at Frances's arm. "Why don't we take a cab? I loathe this awful street, all these men smooking at you!"

"Take longer than walking. Besides this street goes the other way."

"It would! I'm just coming apart, I've got the jitters so. I mean will she be shocked, your aunt? Even if she is, somebody's got to be. It's a lousy arrangement, fixing this business so you can't hide it. Who thought that up anyway?"

"Stop jittering," Frances had said briskly. "You can't shock Aunt Doris. I don't know what she'll *do*, of course. Julia, it isn't anyone you'd like to marry, is it?"

"It is not."

They hurried on in silence after that, across the Avenue, eastward through less crowded blocks. Once Frances saw their reflection in the plate glass of a florist's window, two figures moving in half-transparency against mimosa and drifts of dogwood blossoms. Pictures of spring, she thought in confused bitterness.

They had to sit for a time in the downstairs waiting room, with other patients: a woman in fusty black coat, a child beside her on the settee, a restless little boy, one leg in an iron brace which banged against the wooden seat whenever he moved. In the corner a woman with a round, blank face, her checked coat strained over her distended shapeless body. Julia looked at her, and then twisted a chair so that she couldn't see

her. The maid ushered in others, an anxious thin man with a woman, his wife, also thin and very white. They looked at each other, all of them, in occasional startled looks, hostile and inquisitive. What's wrong with you? You needn't think you can see the doctor ahead of me. I was first.

A door opened upstairs, Frances heard her aunt laugh, and suddenly she sat up straighter, the nightmare feeling of the morning gone. Doris would know what to do. She would know what to do for each of these people, and for Julia. A young woman came down the stairs, turning to wave, and then Doris was there, at the landing, looking down in her straight, unhurried way. The pregnant woman pushed herself out of her chair.

"Just a moment, Mrs. Polzer. You'll excuse me if I speak to my niece? She telephoned for an appointment."

Frances had thought Doris hadn't even seen her! She seized Julia's cold hand and hurried her up the stairs. "It's not about me," she said. "It's Julia. She has to see you. Julia Wells."

"Can't she come in, too?" begged Julia, as Doris motioned toward the office.

"She'll wait in the living room."

Frances didn't like to remember the time she waited, with grisly fragments of half-knowledge tormenting her. Suppose Julia died. They did sometimes. Then her aunt would be arrested! Suppose—she stuffed her forefingers into her ears, lest she hear some sound. A black age later Doris opened that door, and came into the living room. She looked down at Frances a moment before she spoke. Frances watched her hands first, white, supple fingers in that characteristic gesture of adjusting dark coat sleeves over white silk cuffs. Then she lifted her eyes, and couldn't interpret the dark eyes and stern mouth. Doris smiled at her, and Frances thought: she looks like my mother when she smiles.

"Julia's all right." Doris sat down beside Frances. "If she didn't lie about dates."

"Julia never lies. She's the soul of honor!" Frances flushed. "About being honest, I mean."

"Yes. She's getting dressed. I have just a minute. She's a good friend of yours?" Frances nodded. "I think she's just upset her whole works, the way she's been living. Sometimes I think if another young female quotes Millay's poem about the candle as an excuse—gives a lovely light my eye! If you burn a candle at both ends, what happens to it? It's useless. It can't even stand up. It's a welter of soft wax in a minute. Someone has to hold it! It's not a light, it's a nuisance, it's a burden. Your friend Julia ought to spend a year in a sanitarium before she's fit for anything, work, or love, or marriage. How you can think you're so hard-boiled, and be so utterly sentimental—" She reached suddenly for Frances's hand. "But I needn't scold you. Or should I?"

"Not yet. But I don't think Julia was wicked to have lovers."

"If they'd been lovers! Love doesn't begin in bed, it ends there!" And then she had dropped the girl's hand, and got up to walk across the floor. "It isn't easy." She turned back from the window, her interlaced hands like a lovely marble cast against her dark skirt. "Women pretended for so long that they were sexless, that now when they admit the truth, they can't wait to prove it. Let's see, you're almost twenty, aren't you?" And then she had added, "If you're wise, you'll wait until you know you are in love. Your body might be content with less. You wouldn't."

Julia stood at the door, her hat at its pertest angle, make-up renewed, but face still pale, her eyes round and childish with a startled incredulity.

"Did you hear the glad tidings they brought?" she asked,

and her mouth trembled. "I—I'm really terribly grateful, Dr. Langley."

"If you'll do as I said, and come back after a week or so, I'll see if I can get you in shape for a job. You do want one, I suppose."

"I've got to have one. My father's spent money on me long enough."

"Just what I said about that damned candle." Doris gleamed at Frances. "Well, take your choice. A complete smash-up, or something you might enjoy more than that."

She followed them to the stair-landing, and called Mrs. Polzer, who puffed up past them with a glare. On the street Julia waved at a cruising taxi. "We'll celebrate by a ride home," she said. "Doctor's advice. I mustn't run around so much." Then she was silent, rubbing a handkerchief into a ball between her palms. Frances thought: if she mocks at Aunt Doris, I'll choke her! She stared at the framed photograph of the driver, Anton Legloff, and thought: they ought to shoot the back of his necks and ears if they want us to recognize him. She couldn't, in the cab with the ticking meter, think about what Doris had said. Then Julia sighed. "She is a brick, isn't she? You know, she didn't make me feel like a worm so much as a complete ignoramus. Why do you suppose she never got married? She must have a lover to know so much."

Frances opened her mouth in a gasp, and shut it again. She didn't know. She'd never even wondered.

"Maybe she's outgrown it. She must be quite old, although she's still beautiful. Don't look so shocked, darling. Didn't it ever occur to you that even your relatives have sex life? Don't pay me any mind. I'm so damned happy I don't know what I'm saying."

Frances leaned forward to push tight shut the window behind the driver's head. "A doctor can't help knowing everything," she said, troubled.

"Why begrudge her a lover? But have it your own way, my pet. Only she's not my idea of a sex-starved spinster." Julia extracted a cigarette from a silver case, tapped it on a pointed fingernail, and then poked it back into the case. "Heck, I forgot. I gotta be gentle, Julia, without a vice to my back. Cut cigs, gin, boy friends, for a week, and go back for a—what was it?—a basal metabolism test. That's better than what I thought I was going for. Frances, isn't it odd to think we haven't really any morals, we just have glands? I'm hyperthyroid, and you aren't, and so you're still a nice girl but you needn't take any credit for it."

"Did Doris say that?"

"Not exactly. It added up to the same answer. I'll tell you what she did say, though." Julia moved along the seat close to Frances. "Please put your arm around me. I'm cold or something." Frances held her, and after a moment the spasm of shivering stopped. "First she said if I was going to have a baby, I'd have to have it, as far as she was concerned. She wasn't that kind of doctor. I told her I knew where to find one, and she asked if I knew some of the possible consequences. Then I said I'd rather be dead than found out, and she said death wasn't very common any more, it was such a flourishing business their technique was better. But I didn't know that if you had it done, you might never have any children. Did you? She told me about one woman. Her husband doesn't know she'd had any other men before him, and she's crazy about him, and now she's frantic because she can't get him a baby, and can't tell him why. I said how could you get a husband if you had a handful of little waifs, and Dr. Langley laughed."

"It begins to look," said Frances, slowly, "as if that old adage about the woman paying had something to it."

"I said it wasn't fair, and Dr. Langley said fairness didn't touch it. She said as long as a woman's body was different,

the consequences were different. Well, by heck, I haven't any little consequence this time." Julia lay still a moment, her back stiff on Frances's arm. Then she sat up briskly and popped open a vanity case. "She told me I could have nice kids as easy as anything, I was built just right. Oh, well—" She dabbed at her mouth, pulled a curl forward, adjusted the pleated frill at her neck.

Frances had stared through the grimy window. The cab had halted for a traffic light, men and women hurried along the sidewalks, looked out of windows of the streetcar drawn up beside the cab, drove across in front of them with the jerk of starting. A block away, framed between the sharp edges of buildings, under a pale spring sun not yet high enough to cut into the canyon of the street, were trees, just coming into leaf, so that the delicacy of green seemed a mist behind their dark branches, almost the sky itself. She pressed her knees, the palms of her hands softly together, as if she felt stirring in her flesh deeper than mere sensation her first comprehension of the rhythm of her life. She would never forget that moment, never see that faint mist of spring leafing without renewing that first acceptance of herself as woman. This is I, thus must I live, with love as an endless curve, not as jagged points. Not that she knew then what she had discovered, beyond that in the essential difference between her and any man lay all the richness of her coming life.

They had discussed it, she and Julia, or Mary, or some other girl. "Honest to God, Frances, you sound like a Victorian!"

"That's not what I mean. You aren't free if you do things because men do them. I think women got started off wrong, because they'd been cooped up so. You're free only when you're most yourself."

"What do you mean, yourself? You're free when you do as you please, aren't you?" Julia had been moody and irritable



most of the spring. (If it weren't for your aunt, I'd chuck everything, she told Frances. I go down there with my nerves snarled in knots, and it's as if she put her fingers on them and combed them straight.) "And that's not much of the time, if you're a female. I wish I were a man. They get all the breaks."

"I don't. I like being a woman. Sometimes when you're doing things don't you feel as if they used you all up, you fitted into them smooth as a glove? Listening to music, or finishing up a term paper, or coming in to a fire after a long walk? I can't explain. But I'd like to have that feeling about more things. Work. That's why I couldn't be a doctor. It didn't fit. Love. I think there ought to be more to it!"

"Well, my pet, live and learn. You know the only place for great lovers any more is on the silver screen. Look at the men we know. What do they want? Have themselves a good time, make good money, and maybe when they're forty or so pick a young cutie to raise a family. The thing I'm going to do is to look around for one of the old boys while I'm still a cutie."

That, in a way, was just what Julia had done. She had graduated that June, she had gone that fall to a middle-western city to teach, and at Christmas she had married a banker, a widower with a son as old as Julia. I ought to write to her, thought Frances, fleetingly. Maybe he's lost all his money. "He has a lovely house on a bluff above the river," Julia had written, "and evidently the dear-departed had good taste. He is bald and portly, but he is both rich and kind . . . not a demanding type."

Maclaren was demanding. Frances felt her heart quicken as she let him in again. Not that she had really lost him for an instant. Dropping into the past before she knew him was like holding her breath when all the time she stood where winds blew over the ocean, over strange fragrant gardens, over green glaciers. Demanding. Asking his due, not humbly, as his right because of love. Impatient when she failed to

understand quickly something he had said, if she clumsily had not followed the silver flashing fine thread of thought or feeling he spun for her. Moody, so that she must turn herself into something small and quiet and alert as any mouse, feeling her way along the surface of doubt as suspicion or anger or fear until she found the crevice which would admit her. He had been lonely and proud and over-sensitive so long: he was not yet accustomed to revealing himself. He demanded more than she could yet give, but she had no fear. He loved her, and what he asked of her became rain and sunlight for growth; searching for him she found herself.

Yes, she would tell Doris first of all about Maclaren. Then she'd have to tell her father. She smiled a little, thinking of the awful face Maclaren had made when she said, "You'll have to meet the family now, if you are going to marry me."

"I can't!" He had groaned. "I'd be paralyzed. I'll say the wrong thing. I always do, with strangers. They'll never let you marry me."

"If you could just let them see what you're really like, instead of freezing up and looking so haughty."

"That's the last thing in life I want!" He had shouted a little.

"Well—I'll tell them how wonderful you are."

"That ought to get a good laugh." His eyes were brilliant and magnified behind the glasses. "Why does it sound ridiculous for a man to say he means to be a poet? If you could say, 'Dear Father, the man I want to marry is a plumber, or an engineer, or a policeman . . .' Don't you see how satisfying that would be? I won't have you telling them about me. I don't know why I've told you everything. You're so—so insidious! Before I know it, I am telling you things I never knew I thought or felt."

"Am I insidious?" She had held his hand against her cheek. "I'll just say you're in a publishing house and I love you very

much. Will that do?" She slid her own hand under her cheek. It didn't feel like his. His had hard, strong bones under the warm flesh, and the tips of his fingers touched her into beauty. Thinking thus, she fell asleep.

When, the next morning, she telephoned to Doris, the maid told her Dr. Langley was out of town for two weeks. No'm, she didn't have her address. Frances sat at the telephone stand, drawing little M's along the edge of the directory. She had wanted to tell Doris first. Doris's thought would move along with hers, smoothly, comprehendingly. Telling Father was harder. Because he was her father, because he was a man, all his thoughts would have a different root, it would move at a tangent away from hers. "He'll think he's losing me, and it won't be the same, for all I love him, too. I want him to like Maclaren, but if he didn't, it couldn't make any difference, except to make me unhappy." Like trying a door and finding it not locked, this testing of her affection for her father. She could remember when she had been—not quite afraid, perhaps—worried by a need to please him, to placate him. Had he grown easier to please, or had she grown wiser, or had she drawn away, absorbed in work, in friends, in love? And now, just when he was in a state about money and business, she had to startle him with Maclaren. For a moment guilt chilled her, drifting into her mood like a low pennant of fog. But only for a moment. Her father would still have Bill and Candy, and she could keep an eye on them even if she did marry. "How's the young man propose to support you?" She could hear Father. "Who is he? Where does he come from?" Irrelevant questions. He comes from a little town in Maine, his father was a lawyer, he hasn't any money, but I'm going to work, too, and so you see going to college wasn't wasted! Please like each other! She knew. She would ask Maclaren to dinner. Dinner was easier than sitting in chairs, with nothing to do but say, "May I have the hand of your daughter in

marriage?" She giggled softly. Imagine Maclaren using a stiff phrase like that! Maclaren would just sit silent, not awkward, but with that beautiful quiet balance. "Why don't you ever talk to people?" Frances had asked him. "I talk to you constantly," he said.

"To other people. This afternoon, when we met Jack and Mary and—"

"You mean why don't I chatter."

"But they're friends of mine, and I introduced you, and you shut up like a clam. They must have thought you didn't like them. It isn't chattering to be pleasant, is it?"

"But I had nothing to say. I couldn't tell the girl I was hunting for a word for the color of her hair, could I? That's all I was thinking."

"You don't have to say what you're thinking." (Mary ran around bareheaded on purpose, her red hair being her one real point, but Frances wouldn't say that.)

"You can't say what you aren't thinking. At least I can't."

"It's only that I'd like people to appreciate you."

"You do. That's enough."

It would be pretty bad, if he acted like that. Dinner would be better, with Candy running on, with Arnold busy being host. She'd say, "Maclaren's rather shy, don't expect him to say much." He wasn't shy. She didn't know the word for the quality of his reserve; it was a resentment against intrusion, as if his inner life had completeness and meaning which he must guard from violation.

At six that evening Frances sat at her dressing table, polishing nails which already shone. She might even yet slip down to meet Maclaren at the door, and the two of them could have dinner alone, a bus ride, like last night. She had not seen Maclaren all day. He had telephoned that he had a manuscript to cut for the firm, and would be down town until late. When she had said, breathless, "Will you come for dinner?" he

had been silent so long she had called his name sharply, fearing she had lost him, that he had somewhere, miles away, folded back the door of a grimy telephone booth, walked out unheeded. But, "Yes," he answered. "I suppose I must. At least you'll be there."

Now panic was upon her, little furry moth-panic beating against the intense light of expectation. Bill had come home, hours ago, and shut himself into his own room. Frances had knocked on his door. "Bill!" and at his "Yeuh?" had looked in. Bill sat at his table, and at her entrance moved his arms hastily to cover whatever lay before him. "Bill, I'm having a guest for dinner. Put on a shirt with all its buttons, please, and don't go tearing off at the last minute so you're late. What you doing? I thought your exams were all over."

"They are," said Bill. "I'm just conducting a little private research." He looked at her with his most annoying expression of fending off inquiry. "Who's coming that I must wear buttons?"

"A man I know." Frances pressed her hands together. She wanted to hug Bill's funny, tousled head. "Quite special. I want him to see how nice my family is."

"Good Lord," said Bill, "is it that serious?"

Frances nodded. Bill was sweet, the way he glowered at her with that proprietary air. "See here! Who is the fella?"

"You'll see. Don't scowl at him like that or you'll scare him to pieces."

"You don't expect me to fall on his neck, do you? I thought you had more sense."

Frances laughed at Bill's mutters. "Listen, Bill, I've told you first of all. I'll need your help at dinner. Keep the ball rolling and all that." She had thrown him a kiss and closed the door on his quick protest. Now she wished she had said nothing to him. He would probably stare at Maclaren, matching the latter's silence with his own, blowing out his nostrils. Brothers

and fathers were like that, resenting the appearance of a strange male.

Then Hulda had been fractious, just because Frances had changed her mind several times about which cloth to use on the table, and whether to take down the best service plates or not. "Is it the Prince of Wales you're expecting? You'll drive me out of my head!"

"I don't want anything elaborate, but just very nice," Frances explained, and at Hulda's, "If the way I serve dinner isn't nice enough—" had walked away with dignity. Hulda could be too exasperating!

Candy hadn't come home, Father would no doubt be late and would smoulder a little, the way he did when he was tired. She didn't know why she had ever started this! She leaned forward, elbows on the glass top of the table, to stare at her reflection. Her eyes looked heavy, her face looked just washed out! How could Maclaren love her? (Turn sidewise, he said. No, less than that. I can't decide which line I like best. You have a stubborn little chin. Are you stubborn?)

At a sound in the hall she sat erect, heart racing. "That's all right. Come right in. I'll call Frances." The three of them, Candy, Father, and Maclaren, his ears scarlet. Frances laid her hand in Maclaren's as Father said, "We found this young man in the entrance hall, asking for you. So we showed him the way. He says he was expected."

"Of course he was." Frances hurried into introductions. "Or did you introduce each other?" Father shook hands, Candy flashed her eyelashes, and Frances had a cold moment in which Maclaren was a stranger to her as well as to them, and she saw him, slight, quiet, remote, his eyes secret behind the spectacles, his mouth almost stern as he met Arnold's lazily appraising smile. "Maclaren's staying for dinner. It's almost time."

"Candy came out to drive home with me, and we tried the new parkway."

"We had a lovely drive!" Candy gave her father a quick, intimate smile, and darted into her room.

She's up to something, thought Frances. Now what? "Come in here and see our view, Maclaren." She spoke too brightly, hearing the tinny animation of her voice. It would be dreadful if she kept on seeing Maclaren through her father's eyes! Was that what she had feared? Then they were alone, standing at the window, the brilliance of a June sunset striking aslant their faces.

"I'm sorry," said Frances, "that you ran into them that way."

"I thought your father wasn't going to allow me to come in. He suspected me. Do I look as if I wanted to sell magazines to work my way through college?" Maclaren turned his head, the light glistened on the fine grain of his skin. "Why were you so frightened?"

Frances looked at him, the shape of his forehead, the clear steady eyes, the mouth which softened as she looked. "Darling!" she whispered. "I'm not frightened." She touched his hand, slid a forefinger against his palm. "I was excited, everyone bursting in together." But not afraid. She must never see him as a stranger, not for an instant, denying her own knowledge of him. It was the kind of treachery a lover could not endure. "Do you like them?" She sat down on the bench, sunlight golden along her arm. "Isn't Candy pretty?"

"She's not like you. Are you sure you are sisters?"

That's what I'd do, thought Frances exultantly, if he took me to his home. Look and look for any trace of him. I shouldn't like anyone to resemble him too much. "Wouldn't it be ghastly," she said, "to fall in love with a twin! You'd have to stay away from the other twin forever."

"It might be distracting." Maclaren smiled. "Better to know

there's no one in the world the least like you." He did not move away from her as Arnold strolled into the room, and there was no confusion in his quick change of expression.

"How about cocktails?" Arnold looked at them under his eyebrows and Frances thought: he's guessed! I can't hide it. But I want him to know. "Ask the maid for some ice, Candy. And a lemon. How do you like yours, Mr. Brooks? Dry, I hope. Shall I mix my special, Frances?"

"Yes, do, Father." Father was being affable, showing off a little, and Maclaren might not understand it was something of a ceremony when Father mixed drinks. Candy wheeled in the cart, ran back to get a sharp knife, perched on the arm of a chair with an effect of hovering admiration for every move her father made.

"Is Bill here?" Arnold shook his hands out of his cuffs, and bent over the cart, intent on paper-thin slicing of lemon peel. "Tell him to hurry up if he wants a cocktail."

Candy disappeared, returning with a solemn Bill in tow. Frances introduced him hastily. "My brother Bill. Maclaren Brooks, Bill." Bill measured the space between him and Maclaren, decided it was too great to bother with a handshake, and with a loud "How're yuh," settled into the nearest chair. "Sit down, Maclaren," said Frances. "This takes some time." She had never noticed before how slowly her father moved, opening a bottle of gin, sniffing it, commenting upon it, rubbing lemon peel on the edge of the shaker, nor how devout Candy was with her service, finding the measuring glass, the ice tongs, almost holding her breath while Arnold measured and poured and tasted and measured again. Maclaren was watching him, his mouth very straight and thin. He mustn't think Father was ridiculous, being so fussy. (It's just more fun, being particular, being pleased when people took an initial, solemn sip and said, "Another of your perfect drinks!" It's a game he plays, that's all. You see, he doesn't do many



things with his hands. He's not like some men, doing lots of things around the house. He's too brilliant and busy.) He was taking an endless time this evening, and Maclaren probably would drink it down without a word, never knowing that the end of the game was the comment. I didn't know it would be like this! Frances pressed her ankles tight together, wriggled her toes, looked at Bill. Well down in his chair, legs stretched out, he was making a slow scrutiny of Maclaren. He moved his eyes, met Frances's, and made what he called a snoot, pressing his nose up with a finger, popping his eyes.

"There!" Candy glowed, clasping her hands, as Arnold filled the glasses.

"What shall we drink to?" Arnold glanced from Frances to Maclaren, back at Frances, his eyes sharp. Her heart lost a beat, raced again. Oh, he couldn't! "No suggestions! Let's say—better days." He sipped at his, looked around.

"Good likker," said Bill, and Frances thought: darling Bill, trying to help.

"I'm a trifle suspicious of that vermouth. Fellow that sold it swore he got it from a French liner. I don't know whether there'd be demand enough to fake the labels. What do you think, Mr. Brooks? Do you detect a false note?"

"I don't know anything about it." And that was all Maclaren said, in spite of Arnold's expectant eyebrows.

"I think it's splendid, Noldy. Much better than the last. Could I have a teeny more?"

"No dividends for you or Bill, Sugar. How about you, Mr. Brooks?"

Maclaren said no, thanks, he didn't think so, but Arnold held the shaker over his glass, before refilling his own. Hulda announced dinner, and as Frances rose with a quick breath of relief, she saw her father, his face non-committal, watch Maclaren set down the drink.

Dinner was less nerve-twisting than the cocktails, although

the conversation was intermittent and saltatory. Father put on his genial manner, and tried to draw Maclaren out, but nothing lasted long. He asked where Mr. Brooks came from. Maine, eh? What part? Fine state. What was his college? The University of Maine. Even Bill came in then. How much did it cost to go there, and did they have a summer school. Maclaren laconically didn't recall figures; not much, or he couldn't have gone. He had a catalogue Bill could see. They had a summer school for teachers and the biology department had a special branch on the coast somewhere, near Mt. Desert. Yes, Bill could have the catalogue tomorrow. Frances smiled at Bill. Sweet of him, trying to talk because she'd asked him to, and funny, too, pretending an interest in catalogues. Father asked about conditions in Maine, and Maclaren couldn't say, he'd been in New York several years. Father hoped Maine would stand pat as a Republican stronghold. The country had a way of using the administration as a whipping boy, blaming the Republicans because they had the burden of mistakes left by their predecessors. It would be a great calamity if the Democrats won the next election. Maclaren thought it wouldn't make much difference. Arnold frowned. No difference? Was Mr. Brooks a Socialist, perhaps? No, not even that. But he wouldn't go on as he did sometimes for Frances, with his passionate feeling for his country, the pity for suffering which tormented him, the desire to understand what was happening to him, to other people, all other people, not in glib phrases but in experience. Oh, darling, you won't show off when I want you to! Candy had been studying Maclaren under her lashes. With a little shrug she gave him up, and turned a rapt expression upon her father. "Noldy, tell us about your fishing trip in Maine. The time the canoe upset and the guide cut his foot."

"Have you fished much?" asked Father.

"Why, Maclaren had a trout stream right on his grand-

father's farm," said Frances, "and a lake. He could run out and catch trout for breakfast." She smiled helpfully at Maclaren. "Do tell about your trip, Father."

"Well, it's the only time I got into Maine woods, and I almost stayed there." Father went on with the familiar yarn, and Candy waited for the thrilling moments, eyes wide, lips parted. Maclaren watched her, and then glanced down at his plate.

He's thinking something about Father, more than he's listening, thought Frances. He's not eating a thing. What *is* there for them to talk about? Their lives are so different, his and Father's. Why, I'm all they have in common, and they can't talk about me. But at last dinner was ended, and Maclaren said he must go at once.

"Well, good-night. I suppose I may see you again?" Arnold shook hands.

"Good-night," said Maclaren, and looked at Arnold; for an instant there was a secret flash, glint of a hidden sword, behind the stiff composure of his face, and Frances tossed light words to hide it.

"Of course you will. Lots of times!" Then Maclaren was going, and she hadn't seen him, really, except for that one moment at the window. Arnold stood near her, not touching her, but expecting her to stay beside him while the door closed and Maclaren went. The latch clicked before she moved. "I'll be back directly." She didn't look at her father as she pulled open the door and shut it sharply behind her.

"Maclaren!" He turned a harassed face, and swung his palms out in a gesture of despondency. "What is it?" She ran down the hall.

"I knew I shouldn't come," he said. "I'm no good. I didn't even say thanks for the dinner as I should. I know what your father was thinking, with his eyebrows beetling at me. You shouldn't have made me come!"

"Darling, he can't help his eyebrows!" Tears deepened the timbre of her voice, and laughter shook it a little. "He was just trying to be nice. Was it so terrible? You have to know them. They're my family."

"They'll try to talk you out of loving me. They didn't like my being there. Why did you have to have a family?" Maclaren's face was white, little beads of perspiration glistened on his forehead, on the ridge of his scowl. "I can't play up to your father, the way he expects. He's smooth and polished. He's a business man. He'll try to undermine—"

"You aren't being fair," began Frances hotly, and Maclaren stepped back, the light striking through his spectacles revealing his eyes, the pupils dilated until they were black, not gray. She stared, and then flung herself against him, hands lifted to clasp his head. "You're frightened now!" she said, and kissed him. "There! Now do you know?"

He held her tensely for a moment, and then they stood apart, aware of the hall as a place where doors might burst open, of the elevator with a whirl of cables. "You're sure?" he asked, and Frances nodded. "You'll marry me soon, soon, no matter what they say?"

"Soon." The elevator door clanged open, and Maclaren stepped into the car. Frances listened to the sounds of the smooth mechanism, dropping swiftly, carrying her lover down, down. She could see him cross the lobby, stand a moment looking up at the night. She thrust out her chin, and went with slow, soft feet along the hall. Vaguely she felt her future as a weight and as a glory, as a maze where she must trace an intricate way with subtle patience. He doesn't mean to be so difficult, she thought. He's different from most men.

She had to ring the apartment bell. As she waited she told herself: there's nothing to be frightened about. They'll have all the rest of my life to get used to him. I won't let them

say a word against him! Bill opened the door, and ducked his head for a hasty murmur.

"I sorta let the cat out of the bag, without meaning to, see? Candy was being smart, and I said I thought he was all right, and Dad said what did I know about him, and I just said I'd trust you to pick one for wear and not for show. Then he said had you picked him, and I said I guessed so."

"Thanks a lot, Bill." Frances took a long breath. From the living room came Candy's raised voice.

"My good-ness, Noldy! He didn't even know what to do with his finger bowl and his doily and— Where *did* she find him?"

"In a book, maybe," said Arnold. "Now clear out, Sugar. I want to see my eldest daughter."

Candy did at least make a little grimace of embarrassment as she saw Frances in the doorway, and she sidled past, hand on one hip, eyes laughing, patting an exaggerated yawn with her other hand. As she vanished her voice came back, "He's my weak-ness now!"

Arnold sat in the wing-chair, his foot drawing circles, his hands springing slowly against poised finger tips. Frances paused an instant beside him, and then, feeling too conscious of judgment thus, sat on the divan, her fingers sliding over the unfriendly cool surface of the chintz.

Arnold's face, without smile or frown, had deep brackets about the mouth, new lines down the cheeks. He looks tired, thought Frances. Worried. All through dinner he never said a word about trouble.

"I hope you didn't mind having a guest," she said. "Did you have a bad day?"

"No worse than many other days. As for the guest—" He waited, his mouth unsmiling— "Should I mind him? Just—er—who is he?"

Frances held her breath, gathered herself as for a dive,

and plunged. "I'm going to marry him. I—it takes a while to know him. I've known him all this year. I hope you like him." Her color rose.

"Just like that," said Arnold, slowly. "'I'm going to marry him.' It would seem not to matter what my opinion of the young man is." He pulled his locked hands hard against his chest. "It's just an old Spanish custom, I suppose, for a suitor to consult a father."

"There wouldn't be anything to consult about until we knew how we felt. And I wanted to tell you first, because you and Maclaren were strangers, and I—well, I knew you both." She stopped, swallowing. "It was only last night that we really found out," she added, and suddenly the child that longed to propitiate her father, to soften that blue implacable stare of outrage was a thin, weak voice from the past, unheard above the singing of her blood. "I do care what you think. I wanted you to see him right away."

"My God," said Arnold, "what is there in that fellow to make you look like that?"

"Like what?" Frances's throat and face tingled in quick deepening of color, but she held her chin high. "Does it show?" She laughed. "I can't help it, Father. I don't expect you to feel as I do about Maclaren, but couldn't you like him, please?"

Arnold gave his long body a quick twist upward, and leaned forward, with a slow, intimate smile. "As long as I don't have to be that way about him! Admit I had a right to be surprised. Tell me about him. What does he do? What makes you think you're in love with him? Here I thought you were all set on a career, graduating next week, a job for the summer. And you spring this."

"Oh, I mean to keep the job. I'll have to work, you see. That's the grand thing, that we can get married right away."

Arnold stared, his smile growing more deliberate, his eyes

quick with conflicting thoughts. "You surely don't wish to rush into marriage with the first man you've ever been interested in, and he not even able to support you? Frances, dear, you've had no experience whatever. You don't know that this—this feeling is anything permanent. The fellow looks like the kind of self-centered little egoist who'd try to rush you off your feet. Taking advantage of your innocence. I've been glad you had more modesty and decency than some of your friends, but I swear I'd rather you'd gone in for a little necking than to have you take the first so seriously."

"I did!" Frances hugged her elbows against her trembling body, anger and pity catching her in a violent cross-current. "I've been kissed, if that's what you mean. Now I'm in love. *In love*. Maclaren hasn't rushed me. He waited weeks and weeks after we both knew. I want to live with him all my life, and that will be too short. I want—oh, can't you understand?"

"Yes," said Arnold, "I'm afraid I do." He sank back in his chair, hands restless on his knees. "Against my will. I'm sort of fond of you, used to having you around, proud of you. I'd like to be sure when you marry that the man can take good care of you, can make a stab at keeping you happy. Would you mind telling me a little more about this Maclaren?"

Frances pressed her eyelids hard against tears, winked them off her lashes. It was one thing to fight when Father thrust at her, a lean and agile fencer, but when he huddled there in his chair, shoulders sunk, and made his voice gentle . . . "You can't know him all in a minute," she began, "because he's not very good with strangers, and tonight he thought you didn't like him and that worried him because of me. You know you do outshine people, Father! With Maclaren he knows what he wants to do, but he hasn't done it yet." Frances looked at her father. There was a new quality in his listening, a quiet and warm alertness, as if he had pushed aside his own resisting thoughts and took hers one by one, waiting to see what, in

the end, they came to. "He has this work with a publishing house. He reads manuscripts and writes criticism of them, and edits them. Work like that. He doesn't work every day, and so he doesn't make much money. That's why it's lucky I can work too. You see, he has to have time for his own work. He's going to be a writer himself,—” Frances hesitated, and then went on, her clear voice marvelling at the beauty-bright dreams—"Poems, mostly, and plays. This winter he had two poems published. One was in the Conning Tower, and F.F.A. doesn't take anything that isn't good. And Professor Rogers says he has great promise. I think it's because he is a genius that he seems different."

"So that's it," said Arnold. He arched one hand over his forehead, thumb and finger moving the flesh over his temples, his eyes obscured. "A poet. First I ever met. Does he—does he live in a garret? Are you planning to move into it with him? Wait a minute, don't be angry. I'm trying to see this as you see it. I'll admit he's a genius, if you like. They're out of my line, so I wouldn't know. But I know about practical matters, such as living with no money. You'll defeat your chance of any happiness if you start out like this. Let him get to work if he wants you for a wife. You've had a pretty easy time so far. I've been glad you were getting some training, with affairs shot as they are. But I didn't send you to college so you could support a—a poet."

"I'd just be supporting myself. Lots of women do that. And I'd rather be unhappy with Maclaren than— Why, I couldn't be happy without him, anyway!"

"You poor baby!" Arnold dropped his hand, and leaned forward again, his weariness gone in a brilliance of persuasiveness. "Let me show you what would happen. Your cousin Richard dropped in this afternoon. I thought first he was drunk, but he was only half crazy. He and Norah have split. She couldn't take it, his loss of everything. Wanted him to



declare bankruptcy and save enough for her. Too much of a comedown, penthouse to a bedroom in Charles's house. They got along fine while he was riding the wave, but with the smash— And a poet, in these days, when the world's cracked anyway! You wouldn't have a chance."

"You haven't proved anything, except that Norah didn't love Richard."

"She thought she did."

"I'm not afraid." Frances laughed. "Anyway, if all the brokers and bankers and merchants are getting ruined, a poet would make a much safer husband! He'd just go on making poems, because he makes them out of himself."

"At least wait until he's made them, then."

"I can't. Anything might happen, and there'd be all the time lost—"

"Well, let me talk to him."

"Only if you promise not to—not to bother him. If you said all these things, I'd have a dreadful time convincing him they didn't matter." Frances lifted her lids high, the clear white rimming the irises; the look of childish candour was gone, lost in a new intensity. "I might as well tell you I'd walk off and marry him anyway. But I didn't mean to do it that way."

"See here, Frances. Were you comfortable during dinner? Did you enjoy the evening?"

Arnold was watching her closely. She set her teeth into her lip, and was silent. His question threatened her secret and dim knowledge of the toil of love, a knowledge not even Maclaren was to share.

"You were wretched, weren't you?"

"Only because I was afraid you weren't appreciating him."

"Do you want to spend your life agonizing over that very thing?" Arnold was gentle. "Other people won't work as hard as I did, either."

"But this was so terribly important, because it was you."

"And you won't care how he impresses other people? What nonsense. Have you watched Lena with Charles? And Charles is no dead-weight, socially. She's a cat at a mousehole, waiting to pounce on any lack of admiration, any missing of his fine points. Women do that, perhaps more than men. It's more than just love me, love my dog. It's a jealous kind of identifying yourself with your husband or lover. Why, I do it myself, about you children." He paused a moment. "Yes, I believe I do. It's part of affection. Take this young man of yours. You may have a fine time when you're alone with him. You can't live that way. You like getting around with people. You'll have to cover up his—shall I say ineptness?—you'll have to carry him, you'll suffer as you did tonight. I don't like it!"

"But I'll know what he is," said Frances, stubbornly. "And later, when he's done great things, when he's famous, then everybody else will know, too!"

"If he'd already written a dozen of volumes of poetry, I shouldn't have rated him any higher this evening!"

"Wouldn't you, Father? If I said here's John Keats come for dinner, or Shakespeare?"

"Good Lord!" Arnold laughed. "I'd make tracks for the club, I wouldn't even come home! Me mixing in with those chaps? But seriously, Frances, suppose Brooks doesn't turn out to be a Shakespeare? What then? You can't know a man's a genius because he's a queer duck."

"He won't be Shakespeare." Frances relaxed, her hands moving together. Father had been too shrewd; he had held a torch for a moment where its light was flame against bare flesh, but he had dropped it now. "He'll be Maclaren Brooks. Somebody has to believe in people before they have done much."

Arnold got deliberately to his feet, and walked past Frances to the window, with that hint of shuffling in his gait which she

had noticed recently, as if fatigue had untied muscles, or as if his thoughts needed all his attention and physical movement had to take care of itself. He stood with one shoulder lower than the other, hands in pockets dragging his coat tight. For an instant she was buffeted by a queer fancy; how easy it would be to give in, to say, "Perhaps you are right," to see her father flash around, his face alight. Against the fancy, against that murmured weakness, she cried out, "Everyone takes chances in love! I'm just taking mine."

"I see you are." Arnold pivoted slowly on one heel. "When do you plan to marry?"

"After Commencement. A day or so afterwards."

"I supposed a wedding took months to prepare for."

"I don't want a wedding. It costs too much, and Maclaren—"

"I can see he wouldn't care for one."

"I'd like to drive out to the little church near our house, where we were christened."

"And then?"

"We'd find a place to live. We haven't planned much, we haven't had time."

Arnold swung his pocketed hands, flopping his coat. "Of course you know I'll be alone. You're the third deserter. Bill in school somewhere. University of Maine perhaps, if your—if Brooks remembers the catalogue. Candy in camp." He paused so long, his dark brows so reflective that Frances had time for indignation that Candy had teased camp out of him, for curiosity about Bill, and for confused premonitory dread of what Arnold was about to say. "I am not pointing this out as a complaint. Nor am I arguing further about your marriage. But here's this apartment. Here's Hulda. At least she's the only one who hasn't given notice. And here, not many hours a day, am I. Wouldn't it be a feasible plan for you to stay here until fall? With your husband. It would be easier for you than running a separate establishment on small funds.

Needless to say, it would be less lonely for me. I should be consistently affable to the young man."

Frances was a small ball of terror, volleyed between two needs, two loyalties, two loves. She could see her father, letting himself into an empty apartment, shuffling across the hall, his face grayed with anxiety. She could see Maclaren icy, hidden, winding himself so deeply into the convolutions of a dark mood that she could never find him. Maclaren would never consent. Yes, she could persuade him. And then? All those beautiful first days of discovery, of exploration, of adjustment toned down, tempered, lest someone overhear, over-see. If they were not alone, chance words, intonations, glances might sink in, splinters over which the flesh closed, to fester. And yet how say to Father that she couldn't stay? She couldn't manage them both. She was not wise enough, strong enough, she loved them each too much, the old love had all the strength of time, the new love— Suddenly she was crying, head down on her arm, hand doubled harshly against her lips.

"What is it, Frances?" Arnold touched her shoulder. She had not heard him move. "Don't cry, child." He sat beside her, put a finger under her chin, patted her eyelids with a folded handkerchief. "You don't like my suggestion? I suppose the young man would prefer you to himself."

"But it's dreadful—" Frances choked—"everybody going off—"

"Sort of a habit among the birds, isn't it? And temporary. Candy will be back, of course." Arnold's quick smile had a touch of rallying malice. "I won't prophesy for you, but look at your Uncle Charles, with both Anne and Richard on his hands again. But no doubt you're right. You need free air the first months, to scrap things out. I thought perhaps I could help you. Now stop sniffing and don't give it a thought."

"I'm sorry." Frances leaned against him. "I'm excited, that's all. I couldn't bear to seem so ungrateful."

"You shouldn't fall in love, then." Arnold got up slowly. "Good-night. If your young man doesn't turn into Bill Shakespeare, I'll twist his neck."

"Good-night." Frances reached for his hand, and squeezed the little finger. "You've been sweet," she said; "I was afraid to tell you, and now you know, and you're grand about it." She sighed, releasing his hand, and sank back against the pillows. "Did you ever feel so happy that you knew you'd float if you walked?"

"Not recently," said Arnold.

"Poor Father!" Frances was silent, constraint rising like a mist above the great full-moon tide of happiness which inundated her. She wanted to offer him something, to let him dip his hands in the tide; if she were Candy, she could fling her arms about him, could say a thousand shining words. Why couldn't she? She couldn't share this ecstasy because it wasn't he who had created it! "It's been a wonderful year." For that she could thank him. "Being a senior, taking honors, having Professor Rogers make me his assistant. You've done a lot for me. I'm pretty selfish, wanting to get married. If you'd been cross about that or—" she drew a long breath—"you know, stern father! Anyway, it's perfect, now!"

Arnold flung out a hand in a jerk of repudiation, his lips parted for some ironic word; then he went with hurried swinging of his knees across the room, and shut his door smartly.



## *Book IV*





## Book IV

ARNOLD shifted into second for the drive up to the house, and even then had to nurse a knocking motor around the curve. The headlights picked out patches of scorched grass in the lawn; there wouldn't be a blade of green left if this heat kept up. He rolled into the garage, and climbed hastily out of the car, sniffing. Just hot metal, hot rubber. She must be leaking oil somewhere. Candy was right, it wouldn't be long now before he'd have to look around for a new car. "Honestly, Noldy, it's a crime! You ought to put it in its favorite field, and let it just stand there brushing flies away with its tail! Someday it's going to lie right down in the road, turn its faithful eyes up in a last anguished gaze, lick your hand, and die!" The new cars go too fast, he had told her. "Meaning I'd go too fast if you got one? It isn't safe to drive the way you do. Everything just climbs over you!" That had been true enough tonight, the roads full of menacing speed and brilliance, people crazily hunting an illusion of coolness by flinging themselves at sixty miles an hour through the thick, still air.

He walked slowly toward the house. Candy must be off somewhere; no lights except that in the hall. Dry leaves from the maples crisped under his feet. Warmer here than at Frances's. Must be the elevation. He'd thought at first he wouldn't go, the day at the plant had been so bad. Girls fainting in the shop, that fellow having a touch of sun in the yard. Damn the weather, just when he had two sizeable contracts to fill! But Frances expected him, and there was no

way to let her know. They wouldn't have a telephone. One of Maclaren's whims. A luxury not to have one, he said. Of course it would cost a pretty penny, setting poles along their mile of lane. He could leave messages for them at the farm where they got milk, but since they got the milk at some outrageous morning hour that did Arnold no good in the afternoon. They lived at the end of the world, but it was pleasant enough when you reached it, if you liked that sort of thing.

Arnold stood a moment on the steps, rubbing a handkerchief over his forehead, along the back of his neck. The motionless dark trees seemed to hold up the close, tented sky, only a few large stars showed, and those with blunted light. He was glad he had made the effort to go, coming home first for a shower and a change. Frances had been so proud of the living room with its fresh paint, of the old beams they had uncovered in the ceiling. "It's over two hundred years old," Maclaren had said, as if that were a virtue. But he'd been in good form, explaining the variation in type which the New Englanders had made in their houses when they went from Connecticut and Massachusetts to Maine. When he chose, Maclaren talked well. Trouble was you never knew what would start him off. He'd been feeling pretty fine because his book was coming out. Arnold felt in a pocket. Yes, there it was. Damned small book to cost two dollars. No wonder few sold. Well, he wouldn't try to read this one. He'd looked into the first one, and he didn't get it, that was all. Funny business, poetry. Saying things so no one could tell what you meant. He liked his words set end to end in a straight line. Frances had showed him reviews, and those were beyond his depth, too, although he judged they spoke favorably. Crazy idea they had, planning to spend the winter on that hilltop, so that Maclaren could work on a play. Suppose the children were taken sick? Frances had smiled. "We thought of that, and Maclaren says he'd go out on snowshoes for the doctor. Any-

way, they never are sick." They didn't look it. The boy was a beauty, fair, sunburned to the color of a new penny, brilliant, tall for four. Too bad the little girl, Phœbe, looked like her father. She was a self-contained child, and already, at the age of two, had a disconcerting way of staring out of cool gray eyes as if she withheld judgment. Arnold had been surprised at his feeling of detachment from the children. He was interested in them, as part of his daughter's life, but he was not involved with them, whether because Maclaren had sired them, or because fifty years, his fifty years, pushed them too far apart.

He turned slowly into the house, his skin hyper-sentient for any change of temperature. This afternoon the house had seemed a trifle cooler, with windows closed, shades drawn. Tonight there seemed no difference; the sluggish enemy had crept through plaster, brick, glass. Candy would wear herself out, tearing around in such heat. Where had she said she was going? Something about swimming. Probably that pool at the Forrester's. He didn't like young Forrester too well, but Candy said, "Don't be dumb, Noldy! He hasn't got a prayer, as far as winning my little heart goes, but he's grand to play with. He can think up more screwy things to do!" Like a floating bar in the swimming pool. Like— Oh, well. Arnold kept his hands off. Candy was delightfully frank about what she did, how she felt toward the countless young men who appeared about the house, who whisked her off in cars or boats or—thank heaven that fellow had been blacked off the list—in airplanes. Arnold suspected that she had immunized herself against love by her desire for amusement. "Look at Frances! The gal never has any fun at all. I'm not going to do that for years and years."

Arnold moved across the living room and turned on the reading light by his chair. Frances had said, "You might hire me to do your house over. It's pretty shabby, and I'm an

expert painter now." He hadn't realized its shabbiness. When they had first come back to the house, Candy and he and Hulda—hell of a time he'd had getting rid of those tenants after they'd gone through the motions of buying and hadn't come across with a penny—he had resented with exaggerated attention every hint that other people had inhabited the place. Look at this scratch! At this burned spot in the rug! Where's that chair that stood here? Candy and Hulda had followed him about, the three of them in a fine rage. But since then, time had moved imperceptibly together in him and in the house, time and its gradual, insidious alterations. He remembered suddenly his patronizing feeling at the shabbiness of Lena's living room. Well, he had had not a cent to lay out. He'd kept his nose just above water in which too many men had drowned, and one more ounce of burden would have sent him under. But things were picking up now the New Deal had its grip broken.

Candace had planned this room. He had thought of her as he listened to Frances explaining that she and Maclaren had mixed the paint at night and painted until past midnight, and in sunlight the next morning had seen the lemony effect in the warm ivory. "But we can't afford more paint now, so we just admire it after we light the lamps. Next winter the dark comes early!" He had not offered to furnish paint. He'd learned better the first months of their marriage. Only under the guise of a gift for a birthday or Christmas could he give them anything. At least he'd got a bathroom into the house. Frances had grown to have a look of Candace about her. Was it the way she sat, with Phœbe, sleep-heavy, relaxed against her breast, that arc of tenderness made by her bent head, her enclosing arm? She was thin, but her color was good. Was it a new fineness in her face, an alert and vital polish, like metal bright through constant use? Arnold did not know. But he watched her when infrequently he saw her, waiting for

that hint of Candace to flash. He had thought, before the boy was born, that she might have trouble with Maclaren. He would be jealous of the child, he would discover how it felt to have a woman turn into a mother. But if she had bad times, Arnold did not see them. Her love was not a matter of quantity, with less for Maclaren because it was divided between him and the children. It had the quality of fire, which is no less for warming three. Candace had been more thoroughly maternal.

Of course Maclaren had more time to hang around the house, to help scrape off old varnish and plaster, to slap on new paint. Arnold had been too busy, and he didn't care about puttering, anyway. And Candace had never had the slightest interest in his work. Look at the way Frances brooded over every line Maclaren wrote, the way she planned the days so that the children were asleep or out of the house when he wanted to work, the way—Something womanish about poetry, that was it.

Arnold sank down in the chair, his body heavy. He had thought he'd come to an end, years back, of self-justification when he thought of Candace. It was seeing Frances, catching hints of what gave her that look, not of contentment but of—well, of living. What would she do if Maclaren wanted another woman? If he got famous, developed into a literary lion, there'd be plenty of females to chase him, flatter him. Arnold could see her, shocked, suffering, and rage smouldered in him at the future he had conceived. But Maclaren gave no sign of such wavering. He wasn't, Arnold supposed, quite an ordinary fellow. No woman wanted an ordinary man, not to live with for a lifetime. Making one's self over was slow and unpalatable.

It was too damned hot to brood. He flicked his hand over the table beside the chair, ruffling papers, magazines. Too hot to read. He knocked a letter to the floor, and eyed it, languidly.

Must be that note from Bill he had mislaid. See, I have made amends a little, he thought; here's your son, you could be proud of him. At least I let him do as he wished. I don't take any credit except that. But that was a step, for me. Funny how things worked out. That chance word from Maclaren had sent the boy to Maine, and now he was back there in charge of the marine laboratory, after a year in London on a fellowship. "I help the kids get started with their problems," he had written, "and have plenty of time for my own. I'm to read a paper at the Bar Harbor meeting on—" What was it? Something about cells and a long word Arnold couldn't make out. Bill had been home for a few days in June, and Candy at dinner had said, "Now tell us just what you do, Bill. You look so dignified and important, and I haven't a notion what it's all about."

"Oh, research," said Bill. "One thing and another. Just now I'm on the track of a variation in *Anopophrya*. You wouldn't really be interested, it's pretty scientific."

Arnold had smiled at Candy's insistence, had stopped listening as Bill handed her a collection of strange polysyllables, had watched the boy, thinking: he looks older, no more sulkiness in his face, good firm mouth, something disciplined, whipped into shape in his expression. Humor, too. He's laying it on thick, since Candy asked for it. "What do you get out of it?" Arnold asked, when Candy finally made a face and cried out, "They sound like diseases!" Bill looked surprised.

"You mean besides the job?" His eyes flickered a moment with a trace of suspicion.

"Yes. You, personally. Why does spending days with your eye glued to a microscope, peering into the private life of what-you-may-call-ems satisfy you?"

"Oh, I couldn't say, exactly." Bill hadn't been curt, but he wasn't to be drawn out. "I just happen to like it. Some day I

may stumble on something useful. What they call a contribution."

Later Candy had said, "He's awfully sewed up in it, isn't he, Noldy? I never dreamed Bill would work at anything. I wish I were smart as that in some direction."

"You have assets of your own," Arnold had told her. He wished she would turn up. Something oppressive about the quality of the night, its thick heat, its lack of any pulse. He leaned forward to twist the dials of the radio, and the croak of a police announcer jarred the stillness. "Calling car 58, 58, proceed to Amsterdam Avenue, street shooting, calling car—" He turned the short wave dial, twisted the pointer; he wanted no hint of violence in the darkness. Ought to be news somewhere this time of night. The instrument crackled, roared. Murder or static. He shut it off. He had seen no clouds, no lightning. Storm somewhere. He rose uncertainly. He couldn't sleep if he went to bed. The news, if he had heard it, would have been further violence. He wished those Americans would get out of Madrid before the revolution wiped them out and dragged this country in. Fascism against Communism, Mac-laren had declared. The whole world will be in this. You watch. Arnold didn't want to watch. He wanted to believe that any day now he might find the world he had conceived when he was young, a reasonable world in which cause and effect operated, and the individual was the cause. Was it cowardly, he wondered, to be glad he had been born when he had, so that whatever happened now, whatever came of the threat of fundamental and appalling change, it couldn't matter a great deal, so small a proportion of his active, working life remained? There had been change always, he supposed. But except for sudden violent revolutions, the rhythm of change had been slower, the curve so wide that the life-span of a single man seemed a neat straight line, just as the surface of the earth seemed flat to one who stood upon it. His father,

when he grumbled that he didn't know what things were coming to, had meant nothing more serious than the way girls dressed and ran around, the way church attendance dropped off. He died without a doubt that the future in his town, his state, his country, would be more of the same thing he knew.

Maclaren didn't agree with Arnold that his father was enviable. They had talked after dinner, sitting on the stone wall behind the house where Frances planned a garden, while the twilight came as a deepening of the haze over the wide valleys, and the blue distant hills merged into the low sky.

"This is the first evening I've really felt that night comes earlier," Frances had said. "It's queer how change goes on, minute by minute, and you don't see it, until suddenly, like tonight, you notice all the missing minutes."

"That, you see, is like the world our fathers or grandfathers lived in." Maclaren's tone actually pitied them. "With change so imperceptible it didn't register. A thing to be noted by the historian, talking about people as movements and tendencies. Now it's speeded up. If each day lost an hour, you'd know it. It's a grand time to live, when you know what is happening, when you know that nothing is fixed and stable, when you are fully conscious that old institutions, old forms are cracking up and new ones shaping. It's exciting. It stretches a man, knowing that tomorrow, next year, he may have to adapt himself to a new kind of society. Whether you like it or not doesn't matter. It should develop capacities we never dreamed we possessed. Why, it even makes my life longer, measured against the great rush of change. Think what I may live through by the time I'm fifty, sixty, seventy! A man's life used to be nothing in the slow cycle of civilization. It's with time now as it was with space. We used to plod along on foot, and now we fly."

"I don't want things changed too terribly," Frances cried out. "For the children!"



"But they've never known the old world. They'll fit the one they know."

Arnold had risen then, sliding a hand under his coat to rub the end of his spine. "I suppose it's age." He grinned at Maclaren. "My anatomy won't adapt itself to this picturesque wall, even if yours does. I'm afraid the same thing would be true of me if the future is as you see it."

"But you could get used to a stone if you didn't have an easy chair," Maclaren had cried.

"I don't want to, and anyway I've got to start home."

Well, thought Arnold, I've stuck it through the bad years, I see nothing to do but go on sticking. Men are damned glad to get back to work. Let other countries regiment their people. He wasn't the only man in America who wanted it kept a place where a man had a trace of freedom to work out his own life. And if that was a wornout idea, he'd still hang on to it.

He thought of his factory. He'd watched men there enough to know that what counted was a man's own quality. Put two men on a job, one had quick fingers and a steady eye, one was a dolt. What were you going to do about that? About anything? Let it alone, a night like this. Whatever happened, Bill would be all right. His little cells, his curious minute animals would go on untroubled by any change in dynasties. Good thing on the whole Bill had chosen not to come into the plant.

Arnold sighed, moving his shoulders free of clinging fabric. He rubbed one wrist, thinking the very joints of his body felt dry, the juice sucked out of them. He might try a shower and a long cold drink. Too much effort to climb the stairs. He'd turn off the light and sit on the terrace. A breeze might touch him there. Candy might come home.

He may have dozed, for he heard the voices suddenly, with no warning of approach, a boy's voice and then Candy's,

mutated, muffled, altered by some trick of acoustics by the corner of the house beyond which they were standing.

"Christ, it's luck, the old man not around. Remember, you came straight home from the pool. You haven't seen me since then. I'll leave the car at Micky's, he'll swear it's been there, I've got enough on him."

"Someone saw us! Someone always sees the license. I heard a car. Curtis, I can't—"

"Don't start that again! We can't do anything else. You want to land me in Sing Sing? I thought you were a friend."

"I'm so frightened. I can't bear it! I keep hearing—"

"Hush. . ." A scuffle of feet, as if he seized her, clapped a hand over her cry. "It'll be all right, Honey. You're just upset. You'll forget it."

Arnold lay unmoving in the canvas chair, and sweat stood cold on his brow and palms. Calling all cars, calling all cars, lightning behind the trees, not yet in flashes, reflected light from flashes still beyond the world's curve. What had they done, what dreadful thing hung in the frenzy of the boy's hoarse words, in the exhaustion of Candy's voice?

A whisper, a movement, a moaning, "But I can't forget it!"

"I've got to go. Every sec counts. Pull yourself together."

Silence, and then the stealthy shuff of the screen door, and down the graveled road feet running, unsteadily, fear-dogged. Arnold's fingers bent themselves in an aching grip, his muscles contracted on their bones. He felt this horror come home like an expected guest. He had been afraid for Candy. He had said, "You don't let Forrester lap up too many cocktails when he has you out in that gun-boat of his, do you?" And Candy—her light, gay tone curled like fantastic smoke over the voice he had heard tonight; the two voices sounded in his head—"Don't be fusty, Noldy! He never gets tight. He's a marvellous driver. What would he think if I begged him to desist or something?"

"He might think I value my daughter."

"Darling, do you want to keep me in your pocket? Or on your dresser, for an ornament?"

He had said yes, he did, and nothing more. What could he have done? He couldn't tie her up, forbid Forrester the house. He thought, she keeps her own head, I'll have to trust to that. And now. He heard, below the hill, the roar of an engine starting. He broke up the fragments of their brief dialogue, fingers taut, eyeballs burning under the lids; *Sing Sing. I keep hearing*. What? *Someone saw us*. Thunder rumbled, the house shuddered behind him. Hit and run. Couldn't be anything less. Mickey's. That liquor joint on the Post Road. The boy was a fool! He couldn't cover his tracks. Arnold got to his feet, but his body hung irresolute, arms dangling, head down, his thoughts conflicting in his very muscles. Not his first accident. Liquor on his breath, didn't dare face a cop. Bad business. Candy was terrified. But she'd let him run. Good God, somewhere under the thunder—he'd seen a woman knocked down once, that awful collapsed huddle of clothes—Manslaughter, murder, hit and run cowardice, Candy dragged into it. What could he do? Nothing? Leave the body to be discovered, wait for his daughter to be discovered, panic tightening the noose of hours until he choked? Candy thought she had eluded him. He imagined her dragging up the stairs, strained in an agony of listening. If he followed, what could he say? But he had to know just what had happened. He had to *know*.

As he turned toward the French door, he heard again the shuff-uff of the screen. He waited. No sound of gravel, no prickle of dry grass. Then, in a quick white wash of lightning, he saw her, standing a moment, stiff as a wooden figure, moving down toward the garage, dragging her feet as if the impulse which propelled her could scarcely hold her erect, let alone set her in motion. He was after her, running quietly

over the grass. He'd left the keys in the car, he must hurry! He crept in beside the car as she pulled at the door. It did not close, and he heard her gasp. In the thin light from the dashboard he saw her face, numb, almost wizened.

"Candy, don't be startled." He spoke gently, but she crumpled away from him, mouth round for a long "Ah-h!" "Where you going this time of night?" He saw her attempt to control herself, to conceal herself, such a spasm of nerves that nausea climbed in his own throat. A flutter of eyelids, a grimace meant for a smile. He opened the door. "There's a storm coming," he said, giving her time.

"Yes. I—I forgot something. I—I have to go back. I— Oh, why did you have to come? Why did you have to come?" She clenched her hands on the wheel, pulling herself up. "Go away! I have to—"

"Get over. If you want to go anywhere, I'll drive you." He edged in beside her, broke her grasp on the wheel, pushed along her desperate, rigid body. She leaned away from him, and again he felt her struggle, her will a thin thread about flailing emotions.

"You can't. This is something—private. You can't be mixed up in it. Please get out. Please let me go." Over the low roof of the garage rattled thunder, and she hid her face in her hands, fingers digging into her hair.

"If you can stop to think clearly, you'll see I am mixed up. If you take my car—" His voice was hard, peremptory—"you implicate me further."

"But I've got to go. I can't stand it." She hadn't, as yet, heard his words. "You aren't mixed up—" She dragged her fingers down to her mouth, made a queer, startled noise. "You heard!"

"Just enough to know something has happened, you are in trouble. I won't let you go alone. You may as well tell me."

She was silent, her body trembling.

"You had some kind of accident?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"I don't know. I felt it— Oh, Noldy, I felt it! I feel it now, that terrible—the car hit something—something that wasn't hard—it sucked against the car— Oh, God! I've got to go see. I can't not go see."

"You didn't stop?"

"No. I was frightened. I—I just drove faster away."

"You? Were you driving?"

"Yes, I was driving."

"You weren't alone?"

"Yes, I was alone."

"Then where's the car? How did you get home?"

"No, I wasn't alone. Curtis was sleepy. I drove. I ran away. I can't bear it."

She's lying, thought Arnold. Forrester was drunk, she's lying to save him.

"Where was it?" he asked. "Could you tell me? I could go."

"I've got to go. I must see." Rain battered at the roof, heavy, almost hail. "Oh, please! Listen!"

Arnold heard, he saw what she saw, rain beating on that dark heap.

"I'll drive. Tell me where to go."

She had stopped trembling, and crouched in her corner, the tip of her tongue creeping along her parched lips. Arnold watched, keyed to instant movement. She might try to get out of the car, to run— She ground her fists against her knees, and he saw, just above the elbow, like a shadow on the delicate curve of the upper arm, a dark bruise. Rage thudded in his ears. Had that fellow done it, dragging her up the hill, holding her against her will in the car while he drove like a madman away from whatever he had left?

"You won't let me go by myself," she said at last, not as a question, but as a dreary acceptance.

"Not if we sit here until doomsday," he said.

"I'd fight," she said, dully, "but I'm not strong enough. I tried to get away—"

"No. It would be useless. Now will you tell me where to drive?"

Presently she told him, in a monotone that died and began again faintly, so that Arnold had to bend toward her to find her voice under the batter of rain. They had driven around the reservoirs, she didn't know which ones, hunting for a cool place. Then they'd turned into a little dirt road, she'd seen it before, Curtis knew it, narrow, hilly, just woods, no houses. She thought she knew where it came out, not far from Mt. Kisco. *It* was there, somewhere, just beyond a bad curve.

Arnold started the engine, glancing at the gas indicator. Wouldn't do to stop at a gas station this time of night, attracting attention. Attention! Good God, was it the thing to do, to take her back? Could he protect her by refusing? Was Forrester right, after all? He clashed gears, and lunged backward into the rain. He knew the roads across to Mt. Kisco. The rain stopped so abruptly that he wondered if he had gone deaf. No, the windshield was clear, the headlights shone on smooth pools.

"What about getting Forrester?" he asked, not looking at Candy. "If he knows the road—"

"No!" gasped Candy. "No! He'd stop us—he—it was my fault."

Then she was silent, bending forward a little, hurrying the car through the wet darkness. And Arnold drove, thinking: it's got to be done. Whatever we find. She is so young, so—untested. She was frightened. But she must go back. If he knew that she could escape, undetected forever, what would he do? Grimly he watched the road. Some things you couldn't

escape. Once they were done, you had to reckon with them. Worse for her to hide, to wait, to know herself that kind of craven.

"It's somewhere along here, before you reach the town." Candy leaned to the window. "Drive slowly."

They found the road, and began to climb slowly where branches, heavy with rain, lashed at the car, where the wheels churned up water running in the graveled ruts. The storm had not cleared the air; the rain seemed instead to have been defeated by the heat, turned into this fog which grew more dense as they climbed until it was a grayish opacity deflecting the light, steaming the glass. Arnold set the brake, and wrenched at rusty nuts to free the windshield. "Can you get that side?" he asked, and as Candy did not move, he leaned across. At last he had the shield high enough so that by sliding down he could peer under, straight into the fog. He left the car in first, not daring to shift on such a grade, and fog gathered on his eyelids, running down his face like tears. If there's anything here, he thought, we'll hit it if we don't see it. Underbrush had filled whatever ditches the road had once had, crowding so close that twigs scratched and snapped against the body of the car. And always the rank, high smell, rain-released, of rotting weeds. How he kept the road on the sharp, rocky curves, he did not know. Only by the sound of the motor could he tell when he struck a few level rods, when he descended, when he climbed again.

"Do you remember which side?" he asked. "You were headed the other way. That would be the driver's side. Where were you sitting?"

"Here," Candy said. "I don't know. I was driving. I didn't see it."

"Did you hear anything? A cry?"

"The radio was going."

"I couldn't use the radio tonight. Static." He had to trap her some way, get the truth, clear her.

"Yes. It was screaming." He felt her long shudder. "We—we were laughing—because it was so funny!"

"Don't do that!" Her last word had shrilled hysterically. "Brace up!" (Oh, God, the pair of crazy kids, tearing along this God-forsaken road, with jazz from some night club split by the rattle of the storm! God-forsaken was just what it was!)

"I won't." She pounded a fist against the door. "I won't."

Money could do a lot. Arnold's eyes ached, straining against the close limit of visibility, his hands ached with their alert hard grip on the wheel. Under his surface concentration part of his mind jumped, needle-sharp, agile, rangy. Damages, if someone was hurt. Forrester was rich. Oh, the bastard, the poltroon! Arnold would take his own last penny. He'd swear Candy had been home with him. A dozen times he came almost to a standstill, thinking a darker shadow of a bush, a fallen tree-trunk, a crouching boulder was the object they sought. If Forrester had any manhood, he'd take the blame. His car, his idea, this ghastly road. If they'd only stopped! Whoever was walking along this road, on such a night, was up to no good. Planning to hold them up, to drag Candy out of the car—

"You're sure there wasn't a shout, 'Hands up!' or something? You would have seen a man, if he stood in the road?"

"I don't know."

That might make a reasonable defense, in case— If Forrester had only looked back! Had determined whether he left danger or— well, say it!— death. There were things you didn't tolerate in a man. No excuse for him that Candy was frightened, that she let panic destroy her. Only for a brief time. She had meant to drive this road alone! If he had known the setting before he started, he could have called police headquarters, said, "My daughter reports an attempted hold-up.



In making their quick getaway, they may have knocked the fellow out. Better look into it." Then if they found some innocent stroller-by-night— Not a child, surely. What woman would walk here?

"You're sure you didn't just bump over a rock like that one?" Arnold steadied the car back into ruts.

"No." Candy moaned. "I could feel it—oh, I can't feel anything else, if I could stop for just one minute!"

Arnold listened. Was that another sound above the pounding of the heated engine, the crackle of branches? He ground down clutch and brake pedals as the fog ahead dazzled into brilliance and then thickened into blackness for a moment, as a truck, magnified into a monster, thundered past. God, he'd come to the end of the road, to the highway again! Another instant— He leaned against the wheel. Close beside the car he made out a crooked signpost, and with his flash-light read: Road closed to motor traffic.

"If we go back," said Candy, dully, "perhaps I could tell better. Where it happened. If we drive the same way—"

"No. There's nothing there." Arnold swung carefully into the road. This was better; the white cement caught more light, he could distinguish the edge of the road, he lost the ominous sense of imprisonment by trees and brush. "Either you imagined it, or whoever was there has gone." He should feel more relieved, he thought, and shook his head to clear the moisture from his face. "We couldn't have missed it. How many cocktails had you had?"

"Oh, none!" she cried, despairingly. "It was so beastly hot—we'd been swimming. I couldn't imagine this, the way it feels—" She drew away from the window, not touching Arnold, and let her head fall back against the seat top. Arnold snapped on the flash-light, let it drop to the seat. She hadn't fainted. She looked drowned, with that white face, fog in drops on her lashes, shining on her dark curls, glistening on

her taut slim throat. "What will I do," she whispered, "if I never know?"

"We'll hear something, if there's anything to hear." Arnold made his tone casual. "There's nothing more to do tonight. Now stop thinking about it and relax a little."

"I don't think. It just is. If I'd only been drunk, then I wouldn't care any more than Curtis did."

"He was pretty tight, then?" Arnold asked, still casually. If he could catch her off guard, could find out what really happened! He couldn't help her until he knew. But Candy did not answer. Arnold had to watch for the change in the fog curtain which warned that a car approached, not light so much as a change in texture which told some sense other than vision that the next instant headlights would burn his eyeballs. Lucky there was no traffic abroad except an occasional express truck and when at last he found the intersection with the parkway, not even trucks. The miles seemed endless, as if time and space alike no longer could be traversed, and he would drive forever with compassion for his daughter a physical torment in his body. But he came at last to the entrance to his own drive, and there the motor, with a shattering back-fire, died.

"Good old car," he said. "She brought us home." Dear Lord, would Candy ever laugh again? Would she— "Come. We can walk the rest of the way."

He laid his arm around her waist, and felt her soft flesh shrink, as if she walked so deep in misery that she had forgotten he existed. Her thin silk was damp under his fingers, and she stumbled. When they came to the door he held it ajar and swung her into the lighted hall.

"Now the only thing to do," he said briskly, "is to go to bed. I'll fix a bromide for you. Got some somewhere. Sleep. Tomorrow we'll see."

She laid a hand on the newel, and then let her head drop

against her arm. "Why did I do it?" she said. "Father, why did I do it? I knew we shouldn't run— I can't bear it, to know I did it. Curtis said, 'Let's get the hell away from here!' I was steering, and his foot was on the gas. I put my hand out as far as the emergency, and then I took it off. I hate myself."

"But you went back," said Arnold. "That's something." (He had seen them driving like that, Candy leaning across the boy as he sat behind the wheel! He had been tight, it was he who did it!)

"No. Too late. What I did was what I am. Oh, how do you bear it?"

"It was natural enough for you to be frightened, on that deserted road, with Forrester so tight he couldn't even steer! He should have had more guts, not you!"

"He wasn't frightened. He didn't want to lose his driving license. They told him last week at White Plains he'd lose it the next time. That was just speeding. And his allowance. His father's awfully strict." Candy lifted her head. "You couldn't blame him. You mustn't blame him, Noldy."

"You'd make out a case for the devil, Candy."

"I could see just how he felt, and I pretended that was why—but it wasn't. I didn't want to know what we had done." Her eyes glazed with horror. "Curtis said if I didn't see, it couldn't worry me. But my mind wouldn't let me alone! I kept seeing—" She ground a fist against her lips. "Oh, why wouldn't you go back over the road? It must be there."

"There was nothing on that road. Perhaps it was an animal, able to crawl off." Arnold saw the pupils of her eyes contract, knew she watched something, a dog, dragging its crushed body—"It could scarcely have been a man, walking, or you would have seen him."

"What if I never know! Will I go crazy, trying to think? All my life I'll know I did it, left something hurt—dead—"

"Candy, if I promise to go back in the morning, when it's

light, to see if I can find any trace, will you go to bed now? It's doing no good to stand there reproaching yourself. I can't do another thing tonight." He hesitated: would it be wise to try to catch her sympathy with a plea for himself? Never in his life had he seen her like this, all her self sucked inward, down, until she had no consciousness of him, no more than if she walked in her sleep, spoke in a trance. Why, he thought, she needs it, every grain, atom, erg, dyne of self, of energy, of nerve force, of will, she needs it all to deal with what she has done, what she sees in herself. "Come along," he said, firmly, and with an arm about her shoulders, led her up the stairs. "Now undress at once. Keep moving." He picked up from the bed the pair of ridiculous French dolls, scarlet and black, their dangling legs knotted, he brushed aside the pile of gay small pillows, he threw back the silk cover, its rustle the loudest thing in the still night, he folded down the linen sheet with its monogram, thinking how soft she is, how amusingly feminine her little folderols, how adorable, and I would have given my right hand, years of my life to save her this. "Where are your pajamas?" Her dresser drawer had satin sachets, the rose odor choked him, the silk garments lay in neatly folded piles, the fabric clung to his finger tips. "Climb into these, go on to the bathroom, get into that bed. I'll bring you a drink."

He walked stiffly through his own room to his bathroom cabinet. The bromide stuff should be there. He hadn't used it lately. He ran the water a long time, holding a finger in the stream, noting that his hand shook. He walked back, watching the bubbles boil up from the tablets. "Drink it," he said. Candy stared up at him, and he sat beside her, one hand under her head to lift it.

"I don't want it. I have to think."

"Drink it." He tilted the glass, and she drank. "I'll leave your door open. If you wish anything, call me." He let her

head down, his hand brushed back the damp curls from her forehead. As she turned away, flinging up an arm, he rose. Not even tenderness was wise. That, too, demanded a response. "Good-night."

Arnold could not sleep the few hours left to the sorry night. He drew a tub of cold water and lay in it until water and thick air seemed to have no line of separation. He went, his bare feet sticking to the polished wood, to Candy's door. He could not hear her breathe, and in a panic felt his way to her bed. Yes, a heavy, almost furry sound. He'd given her a stiff dose. He sat at his window, watching the darkness turn slowly livid, and then saffron, with trees and hillside walking toward him through the fog, with the saffron fog thinning until he could see a small, flat red sun behind the trees.

He shaved and dressed, and hearing Hulda at last, went down to the kitchen. Hulda jumped when she saw him, and squealed, "You up already?"

"Candy's not very well. Keep an eye on her, but don't wake her. I have an errand. Can you give me coffee now?" He drank it black and hot, and walked through the long morning shadows to the gate where he had left the car.

The shadows had contracted to small patches, and the tall delphinium along the terrace, a remnant of the gardens that had been Candace's, sagged away from the stakes, the heads heat-heavy, fading, when Arnold parked the car in the driveway. The metal of the door made his wrist cringe as he touched it, climbing out. He waited a moment in the hall, letting the dim light ease his eyes. Hulda appeared at the end of the hall.

"I thought I heard the car," she said. She puffed a little, and her white cotton dress moulded damply her thick arms and neck. "Did you hear what the temperature is today? I don't see how anybody can be expected to stand it! You oughtn't

to go off with no breakfast a day like this! I should think you could stay home and take it easy. You'll be making yourself sick, too."

"Is Candy sick?"

"She's just run herself ragged, that's all. She hasn't stirred the whole morning. I will say, she showed some sense, for when that fellow came she wouldn't get up."

"Who came?" snapped Arnold.

"That Forrester." Hulda's red face puckered distastefully. "He was in a state, chewing his finger nails, eyes all puffy, and he had to see her, and he was all for going right up to her room, only I stopped him." Hulda glanced beyond Arnold, popped her mouth shut and bounced backwards through the doorway. Arnold turned. Candy was coming down the stairs, her hand sliding along the rail. In the half darkness it looked transparent, so white and listless it lay. She had put on the same frock she wore last night, a sleeveless white silk, crumpled, but she had brushed her dark hair into curls at the crest of her head, and painted her mouth.

"Hello, Noldy," she said. "I ~~thought you~~ never would come back! You must be ~~fried!~~" Her voice was brittle, deliberate, and ~~her eyelids fluttered~~, her mouth almost smiled. "Well?" She reached the foot of the stairs, and faced him. "Did you—did you have any luck?"

Arnold dropped his eyes from her face, with its piteous attempt to give him an imitation of—what?—her usual manner? Under the thin silk, snug across her small beautiful breasts, he saw the quick vibration of her heart, and for an instant pity was almost intolerable in his throat. Like that bird, this morning, as he drove. Birds flew too low this summer, hurling themselves against cars driven too fast, and he saw them sometimes along the road, dead. This morning he had seen one looping toward him, wings struggling to lift the wounded body clear of earth and pain. That was Candy.

"Let's go in here." He took her hand, and wondered how anything could be so cold on such a day. "I suppose it might be called luck." She sat on the divan, a still figure carved in ivory of suspense, and Arnold drew a chair near. "It's not as bad as you feared. You didn't kill anyone, nor hurt anyone. You see, she was already dead." Arnold leaned forward, resting his head on one hand. How to tell her—"She'd been shot. Dumped out of a car. It's not a pretty story. Two men with her. A motor cycle cop had seen the car at Golden's Bridge, had thought he recognized one of them. He'd lost them, but a radio car was cruising, hunting them. It picked them up below Armonk, on that wide bit of road before you reach the dam, and when the men made a break for it instead of stopping, there was a little shooting. The cops aimed better than the thugs, and so Louie Mazinnetti is dead, and his companion squealed. Louie had lived in Croton, so he knew the roads around here, and thought that he'd picked a likely spot to leave a girl who wanted too much. Louie had a habit of shooting, bank tellers and such. He'd made quite a haul in an Ohio bank a month or so ago, and the girl suggested that if he wouldn't split it, there was always the reward out for him." Candy must hear him, although her face was utterly immobile. "You said you heard a car. They must have come soon after you. The other fellow led them back. He wanted to prove Louie shot the girl. That's why we found nothing later. They'd taken the body away."

"How do they know she was dead?" Candy formed the syllables slowly, like a mute who has been taught the shape but can never know the sound of words.

"She had been dead several hours. They can tell which came first, by the—condition—" Arnold stopped a moment, his mouth hard. "Why go into that? They knew she was shot. They thought Louie's car hit her after he'd thrown her out."

Candy's face moved then, in a spasm of revulsion.

"You didn't injure anyone, you see." Arnold felt his heart beat, slow, laboring, in the fingers supporting his head. "You haven't that."

"No." She looked at him, her eyes dark under the sweep of lashes. "Pretty darned smart, picking a—a corpse." She swayed forward, hands pressing her knees together, and Arnold knew she felt again in muscle fibres, in nerves, the dreadful moment of impact.

"I wouldn't do that," he said, gently.

"How did you find out?" Her teeth worried at her lip. "Did they see us? Are they coming for me? What do they do to you if you run over a— Oh, that poor, poor girl!"

Arnold thought: she's got it now, not as an ordinary newspaper story, gangster takes last ride, gangster's moll is bumped off; the figures have risen up from flat print, have taken on three dimensions, have drawn her close to their despicable crime and violence. "No, the police have no interest in you, they didn't see your car, Forrester won't even lose his license. They don't care much who struck her."

Candy sat erect again, and her voice had a sharp note of incredulity. "You mean they won't arrest me?"

"Of course not."

"Then how did you find out?" She gave a little gasp. "I thought they were waiting somewhere until you—broke the news to me. Why, I had it all planned. I thought they'd let me go to the John. Then I'd lock the door, and drink up iodine or sleeping tablets—I couldn't remember what was on the shelf. Then they'd know I was sorry."

"My God, Candy!" shouted Arnold, and heard shock sound like anger in his tone. "Don't make me ashamed of you!"

"But you would have to be, anyway, and it would save you all the trouble—"

"Oh, you little fool!" Arnold laid his hand roughly on her



knee, shook it. "Save me trouble to have you kill yourself instead of facing the music? Think about me for a minute, will you?"

"I did. Before you came back, I thought, if it turns out to be the worst thing, you'd hate it so, a trial, or me being in jail. I didn't know what they would do to me. But anyway—" For an instant there trembled over her face, like a reflection in a cloudy mirror, a hint of humor, of cajolery—"I probably would never have dared. They would have cracked down the door and found me just standing there in an awful dither."

"That's better," said Arnold, drily, and thrust his hand into a pocket. "And now if you want to hear how I found out—" (I'll give her the whole story. His intention, which had been fluid, hardened suddenly. Her youth, her immaturity, had sunk her fathoms deep in self-abasement, in remorse. He knew what a bitter flood that could be, closing over a man's head. He couldn't drag her out. But there was a chance—) "I drove through that road this morning, early. I could see the tracks we made last night, no others. The rain had washed them out or the road was too hard before the rain. I couldn't find anything." His voice was urgent, demanding attention. "I wanted to see Forrester, but not his family. So I called at Mickey's, to ask him to send for the fellow. He hadn't gone home. He was in a back room, sleeping it off, and not much use. Mick got him roused, and he swore he couldn't remember a thing. Blotto. Dim notion you'd got scared at something."

"That's why he came here," said Candy, slowly. "He wanted me to tell him what happened."

"You didn't see him?"

"No." Candy's forehead puckered. "I didn't want to. I don't blame him for—for last night. I blame myself. But I never want to see him again."

"That's one gain, at least," said Arnold, grimly. "But he knows what happened. I told him." He had a flash of pride

at some of the epithets he had invented. "I'd have knocked him down but he was sick about then, and I left." He went on swiftly, before Candy could speak. "I drove back to the road again. I had to find something. I had to know before I saw you. This time I left the car and walked. The underbrush was too thick, I couldn't find anything, I wouldn't make much of a sleuth. But when I came back to the car, here was a motor cop, hand on his gun." He saw the quick contracting of her pupils, as if she had climbed the airless winding tunnel of road, and come at the end too despairing, too heart-spent for much surprise, upon that spectacle. "Fortunately it was Ryan, you know. His beat's the Sawmill Parkway, and he's known me since that opened. He said what the hell was I doing there, looking for the body, and I said was there one?" Arnold stopped, reliving that moment, when he had leaned against the fender with that awful crawling in his bowels, and thought: it is the worst that can happen, then: they did kill someone. "So then he gave me the story. He'd seen my car turn in, and thought it queer, after last night. He was humorous. Was I one of the gang, stowing away another stiff, or what?"

"Oh, Noldy! Noldy!"

"I had to think up a reason quick for being there. Couldn't just laugh it off. Habit of morning walks—if it had been Bill, now!" Was he easing at all that desperate rigidity with which she listened? "I said—I hadn't meant to tell you this part. But now I will." He was curt, challenging her. "There'll be no questioning. The case is closed, as far as Louie and his girl go. I said I'd driven through last night, alone, mistaking the road for a short-cut I use sometimes. Get the picture? Middle-aged, respectable father, on his way home from a visit to his married daughter, in a hustle because a storm is threatening. The road was rotten, as he could see, the hills played the devil with the car, I hit stones and ruts, and something

else I thought at the time was a tree, but after I got home I couldn't be sure, the way things come back to you afterwards. He said it was damned lucky I didn't get along on Louie's heels, or there would have been a second body. And that's that."

"You lied to him," Candy whispered.

"Yes. You see, I wasn't sure, the way Ryan told the story, whether they would look for a car. I didn't know they thought it was Louie's."

"But it wasn't you." Color crept into her face, a slow, difficult crimson.

"And if it was my daughter," said Arnold quietly, "and I could keep her out of dirt and filth and tabloids and licking tongues?"

"But I did it. I'm not worth it—your lying."

"You have to let me decide that. Now you see, it's ended. No one else but us will ever know."

"But I hate myself so— How do you live when you despise yourself?"

"It isn't easy." Arnold watched her, his heavy brows drawn down over his eyes. He knew the very taste in the back of her throat, the way her self twisted and turned and dodged, seeking egress from the prison of the irrevocable. "The first time you have to admit you aren't the fine fellow you supposed you were. You can run away from it, you can feel so damned sorry for yourself you want to die—" Even her arms had a light wash of color, as if her blood rushed warmly through her body, searching out the injury.

"If you want any lunch," said Hulda, from the doorway, "it's been ready. I rang the bell twice."

"All right." Arnold pushed himself up from the chair, wondering that he felt so little fatigue. Relief, in part. More than that, the extraordinary quickening of his thought, of a finer, deeper process than thought, as he sought words to penetrate

the dark flood, stirring his daughter so that she might fight her own way up. "Or you can come to luncheon with your father—" he smiled down at her— "Going through the motions help a lot, you know." She let him take her hand and draw her to her feet. She wavered slightly, like a child first lifting himself against the earth's pull, but her face had a new intensity.

"How old was the girl?"

Arnold released her hand, startled. "I don't know. Quite young."

"Isn't it screwy, Noldy, that I have to be thankful she was murdered? A girl I never knew. If she hadn't been dead—"

It seemed almost, as he watched, that her face altered, the sweet soft contour of childhood chiseled away. "She was dead, Candace."

"I mean— no one is hurt, except me."

"I can't say I've enjoyed it much."

"No." She looked at him, and caught her breath in a great sigh. "Poor Noldy!" Her mouth trembled. "What I mean is—if I can take it—"

"That's it."

"The committee on arrangements—" her voice faltered as she started the old quip— "adjourned by unanimous consent for luncheon." She did not smile, but under her gravity, quick as a falling star, flashed a hint of her old luminous awareness of him.

No pity now, no softness, thought Arnold, strolling beside her toward the dining room. Pride, steel-strong, fire-tempered. A man must set his own hand to the winch to hoist his burden of reproach, of discovery, and Candy had braced herself for the first grinding pressure.













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